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THE PRODIGALS

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THE PRODIGALS

AND THEIR INHERITANCE

BY

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AUTHOR OF

"CHRONICLES OF CARLINGFORD" "THE WIZARD'S SON"
ETC. ETC.


IN TWO VOLUMES

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THE PRODIGALS

CHAPTER I

"IS it to-night he is coming, Winnie?"

"Yes, father. I have sent the dog-cart to the station."

"It was unnecessary, quite unnecessary. What has he to do with dog-carts or any luxury? He should have been left to find his way as best he could. It is not many dog-carts he will find waiting at his beck and call. That sort of indulgence, it is only putting nonsense in his head, and making him think I don't mean what I say."

"But, father"—

"Don't father me. Why don't you speak

like other girls in your position? You have always been brought up to be a lady; you ought to use the same words that ladies use. And mind you, Winifred, don't make any mistake, I mean what I say. Tom can talk, none better, but he will not get over me; I have washed my hands of him. So long as I thought these boys were going to do me credit I spared nothing on them; but now that I know better— Don't let him try to get over me, for it is no use."

"Oh, papa, he is still so young; he has done nothing very bad, only foolishness, only what you used to say all young men did."

"Things are come to a pretty pass," said the father, "when girls like you, who call themselves modest girls, take up the defence of a black-guard like Tom."

"He is not a blackguard," cried the girl colouring to her hair.

"You are an authority on the subject, I suppose? But perhaps I know a little better. He and his brother have taken me in—me, a man that never was taken in in my life before! but now I wash my hands of them both. There's the money for his journey and the letter to Stafford. No—on second thoughts I'll not give him the money for his journey; he'd stay in London and spend it, and then think there was more where that came from. Write down the office of the Cable Line in Liverpool—he'll get his ticket there."

"But you'll see him, papa?"

"Why should I see him? I know what would happen—you and he together would fling yourselves at my feet, or some of that nonsense. Yes, you're right—on the whole, I think I will see him, and then you'll know

once for all how little is to be looked for from me."

"Oh, papa! you do yourself injustice; your heart is kinder than you think," cried Winifred, with tears.

Mr. Chester got up and walked from one end to the other of the long room. It was lighted up as if for a great entertainment, though the father and daughter were alone in it. He drew aside the curtains at the farther end and looked out into the night.

"Raining," he said. "He would have liked a fly from the station much better than the dog-cart. These puppies with their spoiled constitutions, they can't support a shower. I am kinder than I think, am I? Don't let Tom presume on that. If I'm better than I think myself, I'm a deal worse than you think me. And he's cut me to the heart, he's cut me to the heart!" This was said with a little

vehemence which looked like feeling. He resumed, a few minutes after : " What a fine thing it seemed for a man like me, that began in a small way, to have two sons to be educated with the best, just as good as dukes, that would know how to make a figure in the world and do me credit. Credit ! two broken-down young profligates, two cads that have never held up their heads, never made friends, never done anything but spend money all their lives ! What have I done that this should happen to me ? Your mother was but a poor creature, and her family no great things ; but that my boys, my sons, should take after the Robinsons and not after me ! Hold your tongue and let me speak. It should be a warning to you whom you marry ; for, mind you, it's not only your husband he'll be, but the father of your children, taking after him, perhaps, to wring your heart." He had been walking about the room all this time,

growing more and more vehement. Now he flung himself heavily into his chair. "Yes," he said, "it will be better that I should see him. He'll know then, once for all, how much he has to expect from me."

"Papa," cried Winifred, drying her eyes, "if my mother had lived"—

"If she had lived!" he said, with a tone in which it was difficult to distinguish whether regret or contempt most predominated. Perhaps it was because he was taken by surprise that there was any conflict of feeling. "We should have had some fine scenes in that case," he added, with a laugh. "She would have stuck to the boys through thick and thin; and perhaps you would have been more on my side, Winnie; they say the girls go with their father. True enough, you are the only one that takes after me."

"Oh, papa! George is the image of you."

He got up again from his chair as if stung by some intolerable touch.

“Hold your tongue, child!” he said hoarsely; then, seating himself with a forced laugh, “Kin in face, sworn enemies in everything else,” he said.

The room in which this conversation went on was large but not lofty, occupying the whole width of the house, which was an old country house of the composite character, so usual in England, where generation after generation adds and remodels to its fancy. It had been two rooms according to the natural construction of the house, and the separation between the two was marked by two pillars, one at either side, of marble, which had been brought from some ruinous Italian palace, and were as much out of place as could be conceived in their present situation. The room, in general, bore the same contradictory character; florid ornament and

gilt work of the most *baroque* character alternating with articles of the latest fashion, and with pieces of antiquity such as have become the test of taste in recent years. Mr. Chester preferred cost above all other qualifications in the decoration of his house, and his magnificence was bought dearly at the expense not only of much money, but of every rule of harmony. He did not himself mind this. It need scarcely be added that he was not the natural proprietor of the manor-house which he had thus made gorgeous. He was a man of great ambition who had made his fortune in trade, and whom the desire, so universal and often so tragically foolish, though so natural, of founding a family, had seized in a somewhat unusual way. His two sons had received "the best education"; that is, they had been sent to a public school and afterwards to Oxford in the most approved way. They had not been used to much litera-

ture nor to a very refined atmosphere at home, and it is possible that the very ordinary blood of the Robinsons, their mother's family, had more influence in their constitutions than that fluid which their father thought of so much more excellent quality, which came to them from the Chester fountain.

The Chesters had been pushing men for at least two generations. From the fact that their name was the same as that of their native place, it was uncharitably reported that Mr. Chester's grandfather had been a foundling picked up in the streets. But as he figured in the pedigree which hung in the hall as George Chester, Esq., of the Cloisters, Chester, strangers at least had no right to lend an ear to any such tale, nor to inquire whether, as report said, it was as a lay clerk that he had found a place in that venerable locality. William Chester, the link between this mythical

personage and Mr. Chester of Bedloe Manor, had begun the family fortunes in Liverpool half a century before, and his son, whose education was that of a choir boy in Chester Cathedral, as his father's had been, established upon that foundation a solid and, indeed, large fortune, which he had fondly hoped by means of George and Tom to hand down to a whole prosperous family of Chesters, transformed into landowners, great proprietors, perhaps—who could tell?—Lord Chancellors and Prime Ministers. The disappointment which comes upon such a man when his children, instead of doing him honour, turn out the proverbial spendthrifts and consumers of the newly-made fortune, does not meet with any great degree of sympathy in the world. A tacit “serve him right” is in the minds of most people. Much righteous indignation has been expended upon a very different matter, upon the ambition even of

such a man as Scott to found a family: the moralist has been almost glad that it came to nothing, that the children of the great man were nobodies, that his hope was a mere dream. And how much more when the man had, like George Chester, nothing but his money and a certain strenuous determination and force of character to recommend him!

But the disappointment was not less bitter to the new man than if he had been a monarch mourning over a degenerate son. Neither George nor Tom did anything but get into scrapes at the University. They had no heads for books, and they had the habit of rash expenditure, of self-indulgence, of considering themselves masters of everything that could be bought. Mr. Chester would have taken their extravagance in perfectly good part, he would have winked at their peccadilloes and forgiven everything had they

done him credit as he said : nor was he very particular as to the nature of the credit ; had either manifested any capacity for taking university prizes, or a good degree, that, though he would have understood it little, would have delighted him. Had they rowed in the eight or played in the eleven, he would have been doubly proud of the distinction. Failing those legitimate paths to honour, had they brought a rabble of the young aristocracy to Bedloe, had they gone visiting to great houses, had they found a place even among the train of any young duke or conspicuous person, he was so easily pleased that he would have been content. But they did none of these things. George, with the beautiful voice, of which his father was not proud, since it awakened memories of hereditary talent which he did not wish to keep before men's minds, had not used this gift as a way of making entrance into select circles, but roared it out in

undergraduate parties made up of clergymen's sons, of young schoolmasters, of people, as he said bitterly, no better, nay, not so good as himself; and made friends with the lower class of the musical people, the lay clerks at the Cathedral, the people who gave local concerts. He was quite ready to join them, to sing with them, to take his pleasure among them, with a return to all the old habits of the singing men at Chester, which was bitterness to the father's soul. It scarcely made it any worse that George fell into ways of dissipation and went wrong as well. *That* his father, perhaps, might have forgiven him had it been done in better company; but as it was, the sin was unpardonable. When news came to Bedloe that George was about to marry a poor organist's daughter, the proceedings Mr. Chester took were very summary; he stopped his son's allowance instantly, provided him with a clerk-

ship at Sydney, and sent him off to the end of the world, requesting only that he might see him no more.

Then Tom became his hope. Tom had aspirations higher than George's, but he went, if possible, more hopelessly astray. Tom had, or seemed to have, something more of fancy and imagination than belonged to the rest of his family. He was the clever one, bound, or so at least his father hoped, to make a figure in the world; but he was idle, he was sarcastic and hot-tempered, he quarrelled with everybody whom he ought to have conciliated, and supported the company only of those who flattered and agreed with him, and helped him to gratify his various tastes and inclinations, which were not virtuous. If George had fallen among the lower class of professionals, Tom's company was, his father declared, composed of the out-scourings of the earth. And

when the inevitable moment came in which Tom was plucked (or ploughed, as the word varies), his father's bitter disappointment and disgust came to the same result as in his brother's case. The civil letter in which his tutor lamented Tom's foolishness exasperated Mr. Chester almost to madness. No doubt he had bragged in his day of his two boys who were to carry all before them, and his humiliation was all the more hard to bear. He was uncompromising and remorseless in the revenge he took. According to his code, he who failed was the most criminal of mankind. Whatever a man might do, so long as he attained something, if it were no more than notoriety, there were hopes of him; but failure was insupportable to the man of business—the self-made, and self-sustaining.

It was with a pang that he gave up the idea of all possibility as regarded his sons;

but he did so with the same decision and promptitude with which he would have rejected a bad investment. He had still a child, who was, indeed, one of the inferior sex, a mere girl, not for a moment to be considered in the same light as a son, had the sons been worthy, but something to fall back upon when they failed. Winifred, so long as the boys were in the foreground of their father's life, had cost him little trouble. She had been so fortunate as to be provided with a good governess when her mother died; and, unnoticed, unthought of, had grown up into fair and graceful womanhood—in mind and manners the child of the poor gentlewoman who had trained her, and who still remained in the house as her companion and friend. Insensibly it had become apparent to Mr. Chester that Winnie was the one member of his family who was not a failure. The society around, the people whom

he revered as county people, but despised as not so rich as himself, received her with genuine regard and friendship, even when they received himself with but formal civility. As for George and Tom, not even their prospective wealth during their time of favour had commended them to the county neighbours, whose pride Mr. Chester cursed, yet regarded with superstitious admiration. Winifred had broken through the stiffness of these exclusive circles, but no one else; and even while he fumed over the downfall of Tom, he had begun to console himself with the success of Winnie. At the recent county ball she had been, if not the beauty, at least the favourite of the evening. Lord Eden himself had complimented her father upon her looks. He had tasted the sweetness of social success for the first time by her means. All was not then lost. He condemned Tom, as he had condemned George, by attainder and

confiscation of all his rights; and Winifred was elected to the post of heir and representative of the Chesters. Perhaps the decision gave the father himself a pang. It was coming down in the world. A man with his sons about him has something of which to be glorious—but a mere girl! At the best it was a humiliation. But in default of anything better it was still a mode of triumph, after all. It secured his revenge upon the worthless boys who had done nothing for his name, and a place among those who recognised in Winnie, if not in any other member of the family, their equal in one way, their superior in another.

He was a man of rapid conclusions, and he had made up his mind on this point on the evening of the day on which he had heard of Tom's disgrace—for disgrace he had felt it to be, accepting no consolation from the fact that many young men not thereafter to

be despised met with the same fate. He would not allow his son to return home, but had his fate intimated to him at once by the solicitor whom Mr. Chester chose to employ in business of this sort. It was to New Zealand this time that the unfortunate was to be sent. His passage-money and fifty pounds, and a desk in an office when he reached his destination—this was the fate of the unhappy youth, fresh from all indulgences and follies. No hope even was held out to him of ever retrieving his lost position ; and Tom knew with what remorseless decision George had already been cut off. Perhaps he had not lamented as he might have done his brother's punishment, which left such admirable prospects to himself, but it left no doubt on his mind as to his own fate. He had asked, what George had not had the courage to ask, that he might come home and take farewell of

his sister, at least. And this had been granted to him. If any forlorn hope was in his mind of being able to touch the heart of his father, it was a very forlorn hope indeed, and one which he scarcely ventured to whisper even to himself.

He had arrived at the country station which was nearest Bedloe while his father and sister were talking of him, and had been received by the groom with that somewhat ostentatious sympathy and regard for his comfort with which servants are wont to show a consciousness of the situation. The groom was very anxious that Mr. Tom should be protected from the rain, the soft, continuous drizzle of a spring night. "I've brought your waterproof, sir; the roads is heavy, and we'll be a long time getting home"—

"Never mind the waterproof," said Tom; "I like the rain."

"It's cooling, sir; but after a while, when you're soaked through—if you get a chill, sir?"

"It don't matter much," said Tom. "How are they all at home?"

"Pretty nicely," said the man, "though Mrs. Pierce do say that she don't like master's looks, and Miss Winifred is that pale except when she flushes up"—

"How's Bayleaf?" This was Tom's hunter which he never mounted, yet felt a certain property in all the same.

"Nothing to brag of, sir. That poor animal, he's like a Christian. He knows as well when there's something up"—

"You had better drive on," said Tom. "How dark it is!"

"It's all the rain, sir, like as if the skies themselves— But we're glad as the equinoctials is over, and you'll have a good season for your

voyage. Shall you see Mr. George, sir, where you are going?"

At this Tom laughed, with a most unmirthful outburst. "No," he said; "that's the fun of the thing—he in one country and I in another. It's all very nicely settled for us."

"Let's hope, sir," said the man, "that when things get a little more civilised there will be a railway or something. We should all like to send our respects and duty to Mr. George."

To this Tom made no reply. He was not in a very cheerful mood, nor did this conversation tend to elevate his spirits. There was nothing adventurous in his disposition. The distant voyage, the new world, the banishment from all those haunts in which he could find his favourite enjoyments, with an occasional compunction, indeed, but nothing strong enough to disturb the tenor of his way, were terrible

anticipations to him. Some lurking hope there was still in his mind that his fate was impossible; that such a catastrophe could not really be about to happen; that his father would relent at the sight of him or at Winnie's prayers. It did not enter into Tom's thoughts that Winnie would ever forsake him. The thought of her own advantage would not move her. He was aware that, in the question of George, it had more or less moved himself, and that he had not, perhaps, thrown all that energy into his intercession for his brother which he hoped and believed Winnie would employ for himself. But then he had feared to irritate his father, who would bear more from Winnie than from any one. At this moment, while he drove shivering through the rain,—shivering with nervous depression rather than with cold, for the evening was mild enough,—he had no doubt that she was doing her best for him. And was

it possible that his father could hold out, that he could see the last of his sons go away to the ends of the earth without emotion? The very groom was sorry for him, Bayleaf was drooping in sympathy, the skies themselves weeping over his fate. When the fate is our own, it is wonderful how natural it seems that heaven and earth should be moved for us. In George's case he had seen the other side of the question. In his own the pity of it was far the most powerful. His mind was almost overwhelmed by the prospect before him, but as he drove along in the rain, with the groom's compassionate voice by his side in the dark, expressing now and then a respectful and veiled sympathy, there flickered before Tom's eyes a faint little light of hope. Surely, surely, this, though it had happened to his brother, could not happen to him? Surely the father's heart was not hard enough, or fate terrible enough, to inflict such

a punishment upon *him*? Others, perhaps, might deserve it, might be able to bear it; but he—how could he bear it? Tom said to himself that in his case it was impossible, and could not be.

CHAPTER II

IN family troubles such as that which we have indicated, it is generally a woman who is the chief sufferer. She stands between the conflicting parties, and, whether she is mother or sister, suffers for both, unable to soften judgment on one hand, or to reduce rebellion on the other; or else securing a ground of reconciliation by entreaties and tears which she would not use on her own behalf, and often by the sacrifice of her own reason and power of judging, and conscious humiliation to all the imbecilities of peace-making. A woman in such circumstances has to pledge herself for reformations in which, alas! her heart has but

little faith. She has to persuade the angry father that his son has erred less than appears, to invent a thousand excuses, to exhaust herself in palliation of offences which are far more offensive and terrible to her than to him whose wrath she deprecates ; and she has to convince the impatient and resentful son that his father is acting rather in love than in anger, and that his sins have wounded as much as they have exasperated. Those women who have no judgment of their own to exercise, and who can believe everything, are the happiest in this ever-returning necessity : and indeed in many complications of life it is much better for all parties that the woman should be without judgment, the soft and boneless angel of conventional romance. Winifred Chester was not of this kind. She was a just and tender-hearted woman, full of affection and compassion, to whom nature gave the hard task of mediating

between two parties whose conflicting errors she was, alas! but too well able to estimate—the father, whose indignation and rage were in fact sufficiently just, yet so little righteous, and her brothers, of whom she knew that they neither felt any real compunction nor intended any amendment. There is, let us hope, some special indulgence for those luckless advocates of erring men who have to promise amendment which they can put no faith in, and plead excuses which to their own minds have no validity.

After the conversation which had been held in the great drawing-room, when Mr. Chester settled himself to a study of the evening papers which had just been brought in, Winifred left the room softly, and stole upstairs to the window of her brother's room, which commanded the avenue, and from which she could see his approach. The room was faintly lit with firelight and full of all the luxurious

contrivances for comfort to which a rich man's sons are accustomed. Poor Tom! what would he do without them all, without the means of procuring them? Poor George! what was he doing, he who now had some years' experience of work and poverty? She stole behind the drawn curtains and looked out upon the darkness and the falling rain. There was little light in the wild landscape, and no sound but that of the rain pattering upon the thick ivy which clothed the older part of the house, and streaming silently down upon the trees, which were still bare, though swelling at every point with the sap of spring. The air was soft and warm; the rain and the darkness full of a wild sense of fertility and growth. Winifred's imagination depicted to her only too clearly the state of half-despair, yet unconviction, in which her brother's mind would be. He would not believe it was possible, and yet he would know. He

was very well aware that his father was remorseless, yet he would not be able to understand how ruin could overtake *him*. The circumstances brought back before her vividly the other occasion on which she had implored in vain the reversal of the sentence on her elder brother. George, too, had been taken by surprise. He had not believed it, and when at last he was convinced, had burst forth into wild defiance and consuming wrath. But Tom would probably be less simple, and not manly at all: he would never believe that all was over, that it was not possible to make another and another appeal.

Winifred stood and watched for his coming, feeling that if by any will of hers she could bring about an accident, either to delay her brother's arrival, or even to bring him into the house in a condition which would compel a prolonged stay, she would have done it. Tom

would have arrived, it is to be feared, with a broken leg, or the beginnings of a fever, could his sister have procured it or he would not have come at all. Railway accidents occur in many cases when they do harm without doing any good, but a railway accident which should awake some natural movement in her father's mind, which should perhaps make him anxious, which would force him to exert himself on Tom's behalf—what an advantage that would be! Alas! such things do not come when people wish for them. A broken arm or leg, what a small price to pay for the moral advantages of reawakened interest, anxiety, the softening charm of an illness and convalescence! No father could turn out of his house the wounded boy who was brought home to be cured.

But Winifred's wishes, it need not be said, were quite unavailing. By and by she heard

the steady tread of the horse, the roll of the wheels over those little heaps of gravel with which the avenue was being mended. Evidently Tom was coming, without any interposition of Providence, to his fate. She ran softly down the stairs to meet him and prevent any unnecessary sound or attempt to usher the returning prodigal into his father's presence. The door was open, the waterproof of the groom glistening in the light, and Tom scrambling down from the dog-cart with that drenched and dejected look which is the result of a long drive through steady and persistent rain. He scarcely looked at the butler as he stepped past, saying, "Is my father in?" in a voice as despondent as his appearance, and not pausing to listen as the man began to explain—

"Master is at home, sir, but"—

"Tom! Oh, how wet you are! You must run upstairs and change first of all."

"I shall do nothing of the kind. I suppose there is a fire somewhere," said Tom. "Where are you sitting? in the dining-room? No supper for me. I don't want any supper. To arrive like this is calculated to give a fellow an appetite, don't you think?"

Winifred put her arm through her brother's, wet though he was. She whispered, "Don't say anything before the servants," as she led him towards the open door of the room in which the table was laid for him before the shining fire. Tom was mollified by the second glance at its comfort and brightness.

"It looks warm here," he said, suffering her to guide him. "Though why I should mind warm or cold I don't know. Look here, Winnie. There is this interview with the governor; I'd better get it over, don't you think?"

"Oh, Tom, come in and get warmed and eat something."

"Is it going to be very bad, then?" the young man said.

"I think," said Winifred anxiously, "you had much better change those wet clothes; your room is ready."

"Look here!" he cried; "all that about New Zealand, that's all nonsense, of course?" He watched the changes of her countenance as he spoke.

Winifred shook her head. "Oh, Tom, I told you long ago you must never take what my father says as nonsense. He is not that sort of man. Come to the fire, then, if you will not change your clothes. And here is Hopkins coming with the tray. Don't say anything before Hopkins, Tom."

"Why shouldn't I? If he means that, they'll know soon enough. I don't believe he means it. The governor—the governor"—Tom's voice died away in his throat, partly because it

trembled, partly because of Hopkins' presence. "Yes, yes, that'll do," he said fretfully, as the butler placed a chair for him, and stood waiting. "I don't want anything to eat, thank you. I'll have a drink if you like. The governor," he resumed, with a sort of laugh, as Hopkins, knowing the nature of the drink required, went off to fetch it, "would never repeat himself, Winnie. He is not such a duffer as that. All very well once perhaps; but to send George to Sydney and me to New Zealand—oh, that's too much of a good thing! I can't believe he means it. Thank you, that's more to the purpose," he added, as he took a large fizzing glass out of Hopkins' hand.

"You need not wait. We have everything my brother will want," said Winifred. "Oh, Tom, what can I say to you? You know how my father had set his heart on your success—success anyhow, he did not mind what kind."

"Well, well," said Tom sulkily; "you women are always harping on what is past. I know very well I have been an ass. But there is no such dreadful harm done after all. I'm not fifty, if you come to that, and this time I'll work, I really will, and get through."

Winifred said no more for the moment. She persuaded him to seat himself at the table, to fortify himself with food. "We can talk it all over when you have had your supper. There is plenty of time; and what a wretched journey you must have had, Tom!"

"Wretched enough, but nothing so bad as the drive from the station, with the rain pouring down upon one, and that fellow Short pitying one all the way. Talk of not speaking before the servants—he knew as well as I did I was in disgrace with the governor, and was sorry for me—my own groom! Why didn't you let

me get a fly from the station? It would have been twenty times more comfortable."

"That is what my father said," said Winifred, with a smile.

"Oh, he thought of that, did he? The governor has a great deal of sense," said Tom, brightening a little. "He understands a fellow better than you can. I don't say anything against you, Win; you are always as good as you know how."

Winifred looked at her brother with a tremulous smile of wonder and pity. Nothing could be more forlorn than his appearance; the steam rising from his wet coat, his hair limp on his forehead, his colourless face more eloquent of anxiety and suspense than his words were. He swallowed with difficulty the dainty food, the dish he specially liked, and pushed his chair from the table with relief.

"Am I to see him to-night?" he said. "If

it's got to be, the sooner the better. It will be a thing well over."

"Tom,"—Winifred's voice faltered, she could hardly say what she had to say,—“I am afraid it is all a great deal worse than you think. He did not want to see you at all, and if he has consented at last, it is chiefly because he thinks you will then be convinced how little you have to expect.”

Tom's countenance fell, and then he made an effort to recover himself, and laughed. “Nobody ever was so hard as the governor looks,” he said ; “he wants to frighten me, I know that.”

He looked anxiously in her eyes, and Winifred's eyes were not encouraging. Her brother broke out again with a stifled oath. “You can't mean me to suppose that that about New Zealand is true, Winnie? You don't mean that?”

"Dear Tom!" Winifred said, with tears in her eyes.

"Don't dear Tom me! That's not natural, you don't mean it. Good heavens! I'd sooner you were taking your fun out of me, if it was a moment for that. I won't go! I'm not a child to be ordered about like that. I tell you I won't go!"

"Oh, Tom! if you could but do anything at home; if you would but let him see that you could manage for yourself! That might be of some use, if you could do it, Tom."

"I won't go," he repeated hoarsely, "to the other end of the world, away from everything I care for! There is a limit to everything. You can tell him I won't do that. And all for what? For having been unlucky about my books, as half the men in the university have been one time or the other. What does it matter being ploughed? It happens every

day. Winnie, I swear to you I'll work like—like a navvy, if I can only have another chance."

"Oh, Tom, I have said everything, I have tried every way. I think if you were to do as you said just now, say to him that you won't go to New Zealand, that you can manage for yourself at home, that would be your best chance. Show him that you can maintain yourself, do something, write something, it does not matter what it is"—

"Maintain myself?" said Tom. He had left his seat, and was standing in front of the fire, his pale face and dishevelled, damp hair showing against the black marble of the mantelpiece; his eyes had a bewildered and discomfited look. "Do something? It is so easy to talk. What am I to do? Write? I am not one of the fellows that can write. I have never been used to that sort of thing. I say, Winnie, for God's

sake speak to my father! I can't, I can't go to that dreadful place."

"Oh, Tom!" she cried, turning her head away.

To see him standing there, helpless, feeble, sure only of one thing, and that that he himself was good for nothing, was like a sword in this young woman's heart. It is the most horrible of all the tortures that women have to bear, to see the men belonging to them, whom they would so fain look up to, breaking down into ruinous failure. He gave her a distracted look, and when she withdrew her eyes, went and plucked her by the sleeve. "Winnie, for Heaven's sake tell my father! It's all dreadful to me: I can't work in an office; I can't go a long voyage. I hate the sea, I am not strong, not a man that can rough it and knock about. George was different, he was always that sort of fellow; and then he's married. Winnie, speak for me. You can do it if you like."

"I have done nothing else ever since he told me, Tom, and I dare not say any more. He will not listen, he says he will send me away too. I shouldn't care for that if I could help you, but I can't—I can't. It is almost worse for me, for I can do nothing—nothing!"

"Oh no," said Tom; "don't make believe, Winnie. Worse for you?—Why, what does it matter to you? While I am out at sea, perhaps in danger of my life, you'll be snug at home, with everything that heart can desire. And who is he going to leave his money to, if he casts me off? You? Oh, I see it all now! Why should you speak for me? It's against your own interests. I see it all now."

She could only look at him with an appeal for pity in her eyes. She could not protest that her own interests were little in her mind. There are some things which it is impossible to say, as it ought to be needless to say them.

Tom for his part worked himself up to an outburst of miserable, artificial rage which it is to be supposed was a relief to his excitement.

“Oh, it is you that are to be his heir?” he cried. “A girl! I might have known. No wonder you don’t speak up for me, when it’s all in your own favour. I’m to be cut off, and George is to be cut off, all for you! Oh, I might have known! A girl is always at home, wriggling and wriggling into favour, cutting out the lawful heirs. And what does he think he’s going to make of you, that haven’t even a name of your own, that are no more good for the family than a stranger? George wasn’t enough, I might have had the sense to see that—there was me that had to be got rid of too, and now you’ve done it; now you have succeeded. Yes, yes! and this is Winnie!” he cried in a burst of despairing rage. “Winnie! I thought

Winnie was my friend whoever failed me ; and all this time you were plotting to get rid of me too ! ”

Tom had been advancing towards her, gesticulating with fury, his hand raised, his blood-shot eyes gleaming, when the door opened suddenly. In a moment he fell back, his hand dropped by his side, the look as of a beaten hound came into his eyes. Mr. Chester had come in, and set his back against the door.

CHAPTER III

THEY were little, and he was tall; they were slight of form, and he was massive and big—a vigorous man with a great “wind of going” about him, like one who could push through every difficulty, and make his way. He stood against the door, and looked at them; a man who felt more life in him than was in both put together, to whom they were nobodies, insignificant creatures whom he could make or unmake at his pleasure. He looked at his son with contempt unmingled with pity. He was not touched by Tom’s miserable looks, his air of hopeless dejection, or furtive, trembling hope. And for the moment Winifred’s want of size

and importance struck him more than the fact which had been forced upon him, that she had done him credit. He despised them both, the products of a smaller race than his own, taking after their mother, like the Robinsons. The Chesters were a better race in point of thews and sinews, though nobody knew very well from what illegitimate source these sinews came.

"Look here!" he said; "I don't permit you to bully your sister. What's she done to you? She has always stood up for you a deal more than you deserve. If I let you come here at all, it was because she insisted upon it. I never could see what was the use of it, for my part."

Tom's rage had been subdued in a moment. He was supposed to be a being of small will, unable to restrain himself; but he was capable of an effort of the will when it was necessary,

as most people are. He looked at his father with a piteous desire to conciliate and touch his heart. "I thought," he said, "papa,—I hope you'll forgive me,—that I had a right to come here."

"Don't call me papa, sir. I like *her* to do it, since others do it; but when do you ever find a man with such a word in his mouth? Not that I have to learn for the first time to-day that you are no man, and nothing manlike is to be expected from you. No, I don't see what right you have here. If it had been your great-grandfather's house, as many people think, you might have had a certain right; but it's my house, bought with my money—and I have washed my hands of you." He had been a little vehement at first, but now was perfectly calm, delivering his sentences with his hands in his pockets, looking down contemptuously upon his son.

"I know, sir, that you have a right to be angry"—Tom began.

"I am not angry. I don't care enough about it. So long as there was some hope of you, I might be angry, but now that you've gone and made a fool of me—the rich man that tried to make a gentleman of his son!—I might as well have tried to make a gentleman of Winnie. As soon as I understand it, that's enough, and I've learned my lesson, thank you. You are no good, and I have washed my hands of you."

"Father, I know I have been an ass. You can't say more to me than I have said to myself. And I've learned my lesson too. Give me another chance, and I'll do all you wish," he cried, holding up his hands, almost falling on his knees.

"Come, I'm not going to have a scene out of the theatre," said Mr. Chester roughly. "I've given you all you have a right to ask of me—

a start in the world. When I was your age, fifty pounds in my pocket would have seemed a fortune to me. And if you like,—there's no better field for a young man than New Zealand,—you may come home in twenty years with as many thousands as you have pounds to take with you, or hundreds of thousands if you have luck. The only thing is to exert yourself. You'd thank me for the chance if you had any spirit. That's all, I think, there is to say. Winnie will tell you the rest. Cable Line, Liverpool—I've taken you a first-class cabin, though on principle I should have sent you in the steerage. Good luck to you, my boy! Work and you'll do well. Winnie will tell you the rest."

"Father, you are not going to throw me overboard like this?" cried the miserable young man, rushing forward as Mr. Chester turned round to open the door.

"You are going to the bottom as fast as you can, and I throw you into the lifeboat, which is a very different matter. You'll find a decent salary and an honest way of getting your living on the other side. Only don't think any more of Bedloe and that sort of thing. Good-bye. If you do well, you can send Winnie word ; if not"— He gave a shrug of his shoulders. "Farewell to you, once for all : don't think I am either to be coaxed or bullied. What's done is done, and I make no new beginnings. Get him up in time once in his life, and let him leave to-morrow by the first train, Winnie. I shall have to speak to Hopkins if I cannot trust you."

"Let him stay to-morrow. Oh, papa ! don't you see how ill he is looking—how miserable he is? Let him stay to-morrow ; let him get used to the idea, papa."

"I must speak to Hopkins, I see," Mr.

Chester said. "Hopkins, Mr. Tom is going off to-morrow by the first train—see that he is not late. If he misses that, he will lose his ship; and if you let him miss it, it will be the worse for you. That's enough, I hope. Tom, good-bye."

"I can't—I can't get ready at a day's notice. I have got no outfit—I have nothing"—

"All that's been thought of," said Mr. Chester, waving his hand. "Winnie will tell you. Good-bye!"

He left the brother and sister alone with a light step and a hard heart. They could hear him whistling to himself as he went away. When Mr. Chester whistled, the household trembled. The sound convinced Tom more than anything that had been said. He threw himself down in the great easy-chair by the fire, and covered his face with his hands. What the sounds were that misery brought from his

convulsed bosom we need not pause to describe. Sobs or curses, what does it matter? He was in the lowest deep of wretchedness—wretchedness which he had never believed in, which had seemed to him impossible. He could not say that it was impossible any longer, but still it seemed incredible, beyond all powers of belief. His sister flew to him to comfort him, and wept over him, notwithstanding the insult he had offered her; and he himself forgot, which was more wonderful, and clung to her as to his only consolation. Misery of this kind which has no nobleness in it, but only weakness, cowardice—compunction in which is no repentance—are of all things in the world the most terrible to witness. And Winnie loved her brother, and felt everything that was unworthy in him to the bottom of her heart.

Next morning he went away with red eyes and a pallid face and quivering lips. It was all

he could do to keep up the ordinary forms of composure as he crossed the threshold of his father's house. He was sorry for himself with an acute and miserable anguish, broken down, without any higher thought to support him. He never believed it would have come to this. He could not believe it now, though it had come. He feared the voyage, the unknown world, the unaccustomed confinement, every thing that was before him; that he should be no longer the young master, but a mere clerk; that he should have to work for his living; that all his little false importance was gone; that he should be presently, he who could not endure the sea, sick and miserable on a long voyage. All these details drifted across his mind in the midst of the current of miserable consciousness that all was over with him, and the impulse of frenzied resistance that now and then rose in his mind, resistance that meant

nothing, that could make no stand against inexorable fact.

Winifred stood at the door as long as he was in sight ; but the horse was fresh and went fast, which was a relief. She stood there still with the fresh damp morning air in her face, after the wheels had ceased to sound in the avenue. It was a dull morning after the rain, but the air was full of the sensation of spring, the grass growing visibly, the buds loosening from their brown husks on the trees, the birds twittering multitudinous, all full of hope in the outside world, all dismal in that which was within. Many people envied Winifred Chester—and if her father carried out his intention, and made her the heir of all his wealth, many more would envy and many court the young mistress of Bedloe ; but Winnie felt there was scarcely any woman she knew with whom she might not profitably change places at this moment of her

life. There was old Miss Farrell, sitting serenely among her wools and silks, anxious about nothing but a new pattern, amusing herself with the recollections of the past which she recounted to her favourite and best pupil, day after day, as they sat together. Winifred knew them all, yet was never tired of these chapters in life. Though Miss Farrell was sixty and Winnie only twenty-three, she thought she would gladly change places with her companion—or with the woman at the lodge who had sick children for whom to work and mend. No one in the world, she thought, had at that moment a burden so heavy as her own. She was called in after a while to Mr. Chester's room, which was a large and well-filled library, though its books were little touched except by herself. He was seated there as usual surrounded by local papers,—attending the moment when the *Times* should arrive with its more authoritative

views,—with many letters and telegrams on his table ; for though he went seldom to business, he still kept the threads in his hand. He demanded from her an account of Tom's departure, listening with an appearance of enjoyment.

"It is the best thing that could happen to him," he said, "if there is anything in him at all. If there isn't, of course he will go to the wall—but so he would do anyhow."

"Oh, papa ! He is your son."

"And what of that ? He's no more like me than Hopkins is. You are the only one that is like me. I have sent for Babington to make another will."

"I do not want your money, papa."

"Softly, young woman ; nobody is offering it to you. I don't mean to be like King Lear. Indeed, for anything I know, I may marry, and put all your noses out of joint. But in the meantime"—

"I will never supplant my brother," said Winifred. "I will never take what does not belong to me. I wish you would dispose of it otherwise, father. It is yours to do what you like with it; but I have a will of my own too."

"That you have," he said with a smile; "that's one of the things I like in you. Not like that cur, that could do nothing but shiver and cringe and cry."

"Tom did not cry," she exclaimed indignantly. "He did not think you could have the heart. And how could you have the heart? Your own son! I ask myself sometimes whether you have any heart at all."

"Ask away; you are at liberty to form your own opinion," he said good-humouredly. "If that fellow had faced me as you do, now—but mind you, Winnie, if you go against me, I am not so partial to you but that I shall take means

to have my own way. What I have, nobody in this world has any right to but myself. I have made it every penny, and I shall dispose of it as I please. If you think you will be able to do what you like with it after I am gone, you're mistaken ; take care—there are ways in which you can displease me now, as much as Tom has done. So you had better think a little of your own affairs."

She looked at him with startled eyes.

"I don't wish to displease you, papa—I don't know"—

"Not what I mean perhaps? Remember that the sort of match which might be good enough for Winnie with two brothers over her head, might not be fit for Miss Chester of Bedloe. I don't want to say any more."

This silenced Winifred, whatever it might mean. She said no more, but withdrew hastily, with a paleness and discomfiture which was

little like the grief and indignation with which she entered the room. Her father looked after her with a chuckle.

“That has settled her, I hope,” he said to himself.

CHAPTER IV

MISS FARRELL came home next day from her visit. She was a little old lady of the period when people became old early, and assumed the dress and the habits of age before it was at all necessary. She was about sixty, but she had been distinctly an old lady for ten years. She wore a cap coming close round her face, and tied under her chin. Whenever she had the least excuse for doing so, she wore a shawl, an article the putting on of which she considered to afford one of many proofs whether or not the wearer was "a lady," which was to Miss Farrell something more than a mere question of birth. She was very neat,

very small, very light-hearted, seeing the best in everything. Even Mr. Chester, though she saw as little of him as possible, she was able to talk about as "your dear father" to her pupil; for, to be sure, whatever might be the opinion of other people, every father ought to be dear to his own child. Miss Farrell had gone on living at Bedloe since Winifred's education was finished, for no particular reason,—at least, for no reason but love. She was a person full of prejudices in favour of aristocracy and against persons of low birth, but she was sufficiently natural to be quite inconsistent, and contradict herself whenever it pleased her—for, as a matter of fact, she preferred Winifred Chester, who was of no family at all, to several young ladies of the caste of Vere de Vere, whom she had formerly had under her care. How she had managed to "get on" with Mr. Chester was a problem to many people, and why she could

choose to stay in the house of an individual so little congenial. As a matter of fact, it was not so difficult as people supposed. She was a woman who systematically put the best interpretation upon everything, moved thereto not only by natural inclination, but by profound policy; for it did not consist with Miss Farrell's dignity ever to suppose, or to allow any one to suppose, that it was possible for her to be slighted. She would permit no possibility of offence to herself. It occasionally happened that people had bad manners, which was so very much worse for themselves than for any one else. Miss Farrell had made up her mind from the beginning of her career never to accept a slight, nor to look upon herself as a dependant. If offence was so thrust upon her that she could not refuse to be aware of it, she left the house at once; but on less serious occasions presented a serene obtuseness, apologising to others for

the peculiarities which were "such a pity," or the "want of tact" which was so unfortunate. In this way she had overawed persons more confident in their own *savoir faire* than Mr. Chester. She had always been admirable in her own sphere, and the alarm of an anxious mother who had obtained such a treasure, lest the peace of the house should be endangered by the sudden departure of the governess, may be supposed. Once it had occurred to her in her life to be compelled to take this strong step. She never required to do it again. As for Winifred, it was long since the relation of pupil and teacher had been over between them; but the motherless girl of the *parvenu*, to whom she went with reluctance, and chiefly out of compassion, had entirely gained the heart of the proud and tender little woman. She did not hesitate to say that Winifred was beyond all rules.

"It does not matter who her father was—I have always thought the mother must have been a lady," Miss Farrell said, with a conception of the case very different from that of the master of the house. "But at all events Winifred is—born. I never said I insisted upon a number of quarterings. I don't care who was her great-grandfather—nothing could be worse than the father, if you come to that ; but she is a lady—as good as the Queen."

"You have made her so," said the wife of the Rector, who was her confidante.

"No one can make a lady, except the Almighty. It is a thing that has to be born," was the prompt reply.

But, notwithstanding, Miss Farrell was able to speak to Winifred about "your dear father," and to look upon all the proceedings of the boys with an indulgence which sometimes almost exasperated their sister, yet was an

unspeakable consolation and support to her in the troubles of the past years. For to have some one who will not believe any evil, who will never appear conscious of the existence of anything that needs concealing, who will know exactly how not to ask too many questions, yet not to refrain from questions altogether, is, in the midst of family trouble, a help and comfort unspeakable. Winifred's mind was full to overflowing when her friend came back. She had felt that it was almost impossible to exist without speaking to some one, delivering herself of the burden that weighed upon her. It had been a relief to have Miss Farrell away at the moment of Tom's visit, and to feel that no eye but her own had looked upon her brother's discomfiture, but it was a relief now to meet her frank look and unhesitating question—

“Well, my dear, and how about poor Tom?”

“He is gone,” Winifred said, the tears coming

to her eyes. "He is to sail from Liverpool to-day."

"My dear," said Miss Farrell, "it is very natural for you to feel it, but do you know it is the very best thing that could have happened for him? It will no doubt be the making of him. He has never had any need to rely on himself, he has always felt his father behind him. Now that he is sent into the world on his own account, it will rouse all his strength. Yes, cry, my dear, it will do you good. But I approve, for my part. Your dear father has been very wise. He has done what was the best for Tom."

"Do you think so? Perhaps if that were all— But it does not seem to have been the best thing for George, and how can we tell if it will answer with Tom?"

"George, you see, has married, which brings in a new element—a great deal more comfortable for him, but still what the gentlemen call a new

factor, you know, that we are not acquainted with. Besides, he is a different kind of boy. But Tom wants to be thrown on his own resources. Depend upon it, my dear, it is the very best thing for him. I should have thought that you would have seen that with your good sense."

"Oh, Miss Farrell, if that were all!"

"And is there something more? Don't tell me unless you like; but you know you take a darker view than I do."

"There is but one view to take," Winifred said. "It makes me miserable. My father—I hope he does not intend it to be known, but I cannot tell—anyhow you must know everything. My father says he has made up his mind to cut off both the boys, and to leave everything to me."

Miss Farrell grew a little pale. She was old-fashioned and strong upon the rights of sons and the inferior importance of girls. She paused

before she spoke, and then said, with a little catching of her breath, "If it is because you are the most worthy, my dear, I can't say but he is right. A girl of your age is always more worthy than the boys. You have never been exposed to any temptation."

"But that is no virtue of mine. Think what it is for me—the boys that were brought up to think everything was theirs—and now cast away, one after another, and everything fixed upon me."

"My dear," said Miss Farrell, recovering her courage, "you must not disturb yourself too soon. Your father will live to change the disposition of his property a hundred times. It is a sort of thing that only wants a beginning."

"But don't you see," said Winifred, with great seriousness, "that is poor comfort; for he may be displeased with me next, and leave it all to

some stranger. And then, who would care for George and Tom?"

"I see what you mean—you are going to share with them, Winnie. My dear, you may take my word for it, that will be better for them, far better than if they got your father's immense fortune into their hands."

"But injustice can never be best," she said.

They were in Miss Farrell's pretty sitting-room, seated together upon the sofa, and here Winifred, losing courage altogether, threw her arms round her old friend, and put her head down upon the breast that had always sympathy for her in all her troubles.

"I am very unhappy," she said. "I do not see any end to it. My brothers both gone and I alone left, and nothing but difficulty before me wherever I move. How can I tell how my father's mind may change in other ways, now that he has made up his mind to put me in this

changed position—and how can I tell—even if that were not so”—

These broken expressions would have conveyed little enlightenment to any stranger, but Miss Farrell understood them well enough. She pressed Winifred in her arms, and kissed the cheek which was so near her own.

“Has anything been said about Edward?” she asked in a low tone.

“Nothing yet; but how can I tell? Oh yes! there was something. I can’t remember exactly what—only a sort of hint; but enough to show— Miss Farrell, you always think the best of every one. What can make him do it? He must love us—a little—I suppose?”

The doubt in her tone was full of pathos and wondering bewilderment. Winnie, though she had already many experiences, had not reached the length of understanding that love itself can sometimes torture.

“Love you, my dear? why, of course he loves you! Whom has he else to love? You must not let such foolish thoughts get into your mind. Thank Heaven, since you were a child you have never had any doubt that I loved you, Winnie, and yet I often made you do things you didn’t like, and refused to let you do things you did like. Don’t you remember? Oh, I could tell you a hundred instances. A man like your dear father, who has been a great deal in the world, naturally forms his own ideas. And I can tell you, Winnie, it is very, very difficult when one has the power, and when one sees that young people are silly, not to take matters into one’s own hand, and do for them what one knows to be best. But, unfortunately, one never can get the young people to see it—they prefer their own way. If they went according to the ideas of their fathers and mothers, perhaps there would be less trouble in the world.”

"You don't really think so," cried Winnie, indignant. "You would never have one go against one's own heart."

"I say perhaps, my dear," said Miss Farrell mildly,—“only perhaps. It is a thing no one can be arbitrary about. To have one's own way is the most satisfactory thing, so long as it lasts, but often ‘thereof comes in the end perplexity and madness.’ Then one thinks, if one had but taken the other turn! Nobody knows, till time shows, which is for the best.”

"Is that a proverb?" asked Winnie, with some youthful scorn.

"It sounds a little like it," said the cheerful old lady, with a little laugh, "but, the rhyme was quite unintentional; and, as a matter of fact, we know that whatever happens to us in God's providence is for the best."

"Is my father's hardheartedness God's provi-

dence?" said Winifred, her face becoming almost severe in youthful gravity.

It was not a question easy to answer. She scarcely listened to the little lecture Miss Farrell gave, as to the wickedness of condemning her father, or calling that hardheartedness which probably was the highest exercise of watchful tenderness. "I don't know that I should have had the strength of mind to carry it out ; but, my dear," she said, "I have not the very slightest doubt that this is by far the best thing for Tom. He will come home a better man ; he will have found out that life is different from what he thinks. It may be the making of him. Your dear father, who is stronger-minded than we are, does it, you may be sure, for the best."

"And if I am ordered to give up everything I care for, perhaps you will think that for the best too," said the girl, withdrawing, half sorrowful, half indignant. The elder woman gave her

a look full of love and sorrow. Behind the smiling of her cheerful little countenance there was that consciousness which belongs to experience, that teaching of a long life which at her age throws confusing lights upon much that is plain and simple to the uninstructed. Miss Farrell in her heart answered this last indignant question in a manner which would have confounded Winifred ; but she said nothing. "Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof."

CHAPTER V

WINIFRED, it will be divined, was not without affairs of her own, which were indeed kept in the background by the more urgent complications of her family life, but yet were always there ; and in every moment of repose came in to fill up with sweetness mingled with pain all the intervals of her thoughts. A few years before, when Mr. Chester had retired from business and had come to live permanently at Bedloe, he had begun his life of ease by a long illness, an illness at once dangerous and tedious, which he had been "pulled through" by a young doctor, still quite unknown to fame, who had devoted himself to the case of his

patient with an absorbing attention such as elderly gentlemen of mercantile connections rarely call forth. Mr. Chester was a man who was always sensible of services rendered personally to himself, and as young Dr. Langton gave up both time and ease to him, watched by his bedside at the crisis of the disease, and never grudged to be called out of bed or disturbed at any moment of the day or night, it was natural that a grateful patient should form the highest idea of the man who had saved his life.

It did not detract from the merits of the young doctor that he belonged, though remotely, to a county family, the ancient owners of Bedloe, and that he held a higher place in the general estimation than the new millionaire himself, whose advent had not been received with enthusiasm. Dr. Langton, indeed, was of considerable use to the new-established household.

He decided several important people to call who had no immediate intention of calling, and described with so much fervour the sweetness and good manners of the young lady of the house, that the way had thus been smoothed for that universal acceptance of Winifred which had opened her father's eyes to the fact that she alone of all the family did him credit. Unfortunately, Dr. Langton went a little farther than this. He was young, and Winifred was but just taking upon her the independent position of mistress of her father's house. They saw each other every day, watched together at the sick-bed, and met in the most unrestrained intimacy—and the natural result followed. Had Winifred been poor, all his friends would have protested that she was a very bad match for Edward Langton, who was believed to have what is called a fine career before him; but as she was, instead the daughter of a very rich

man, it was permissible that on her side of the question Edward Langton should be supposed a very poor match for Winifred. It had been accordingly with very doubtful feelings and a great screwing up of his courage that the young doctor had presented himself before the rich man and asked him for his daughter. The reception he received was less terrible than he feared, but more embarrassing. Mr. Chester had received the proposal as a joke, a strange but extremely amusing pleasantry. "Marry Winnie?" he had said; "you must wait till she is out of long clothes—or of short frocks, is it?" And this had been the utmost that could be extracted from him. But, at the same time, he had taken no steps to discourage or separate the lovers. They had gone on seeing each other constantly, and had been sufficiently confident that no serious obstacle was to be placed in their way—but never had been able to extract

a more definite decision or anything that could be called consent. For some time, in the freshness of their mutual enchantment, the two young people had gone on very gaily with this imperfect sanction; but there had then come a time when Edward, impatient, yet not venturing to risk a definite negative by using pressure upon the father, had filled Winifred's life with agitation, urging upon her the claims of his faithful love, and even now and then proposing to carry her off, and trust to the chance of pardon afterwards, rather than bear that tantalising, unnecessary delay. Winifred, with mingled happiness and distress, had spent many an hour in curbing this impetuosity, and it was strange to her, a relief, but yet a surprise and wonder, when he suddenly ceased all instances of the kind, and assumed the aspect of a man quite satisfied with the present state of affairs, though very watchful of all that happened, and curious to know

the details of everything. The change in him filled her with surprise, and at first with a vague uneasiness. But there was no appearance of any failure in his devotion to herself, and it was in many respects less embarrassing than the constant entreaties which she had found it so difficult to resist. Still she would wonder sometimes, accepting, as women so often accept, the unexplained decision of the men who are most near to them, with that silent despair of ever understanding the motives of the other half of humanity which men too so often feel in respect to women.

As for Miss Farrell, who had seen so much both of men and women, she divined, or thought she divined, what Dr. Langton meant. But she said not a word to her pupil of her divinations. She said, "What a good thing that Edward has made up his mind

to it. You never would have given in to him, Winnie?"

"Oh, never!" said the girl, with a silent, unexpressed sense that perhaps it might have been better if she could.

"No, you never would have done it; it is against your nature, and it would have been the worst policy. Your dear father is a man of very strong principles, and he never would have forgiven you. It would have been quite past all hoping for. It is such a good thing Edward perceives that at last."

Winifred did not receive this explanation with all the satisfaction that her friend hoped. She felt uneasily the existence of some other with which she was not acquainted; but so long as there was no doubt of Edward's love, what did it matter? And she was not herself impatient. She saw him every day; she knew

(or supposed she knew) all his thoughts; she had his confidence, his full trust, his unbroken devotion; what more can a woman want? It is sometimes aggravating in the highest degree to a man that she should want no more, that she should be content with relations which stop so far short of his wishes, and Edward had often expressed this fond exasperation. But now he took it quietly enough, seeing possibilities which Winifred had not begun to see.

Now, however, the calm of this unexpected content was interrupted from the other side. Tom was scarcely gone, shaking off the dust from his shoes as he crossed for the last time the threshold of his father's house, when Winifred learned all that was involved in the disastrous promotion which had already made her so miserable—not only to supplant her brothers (which yet it might be possible to

turn to their advantage), but to expose herself to risks which were worse than theirs, to fall perhaps in her turn and make herself incapable of helping them, or for their sake to resign all that was to herself best in life. Winifred had retired from her father's presence with this sword in her heart. And Miss Farrell's consolations, though they soothed her for the moment, did not draw it out. She felt the pang and quivering anguish through all her being. It was now her turn: she was about to be called upon to act the heroic part which is so admirable to hear about, so terrible to perform: to give up love and life for the sake of family affection lightly returned, or not returned at all, rewarded with suspicions and unkindness by those for whom she sacrificed everything. To give up her love, her husband, for her brothers! She did what those who are disturbed in mind instinctively learn to do. She

went out by herself into the park, and took a long solitary walk, communing with herself. She had looked forward to Miss Farrell's return as to something which would help and strengthen her. And for the moment that new event, and all the gentle philosophies that had come from her old friend's lips, had helped her a little. But at the end every one must bear his own burden. She went out into the park, which, though the sun had come out, was still wet and sodden with last night's rain. The half-opened leaves were all sparkling with wet, the sky had that clear and keen sweetness of light which is like the serenity which comes into a human face after many tears. The sod was soft and spongy under her feet; but Winifred was not in a mood to observe anything. She walked fast and far, carrying her thoughts with her, passing everything in review with the simplicity and frankness which is impossible

when we have to clothe our thoughts in words. She would not have said, even to herself, that George and Tom would never understand her motives, never believe in her affection ; but she knew it very well, just as she knew that the grass was damp and that she was wetting her feet, a consciousness that neither in one case nor the other meant any blame. She knew, too, that her feelings and her happiness would matter little more to her father than did to herself the feelings, if they had any, of the thorns which she put out of her way. To put these consciousnesses into words is to condemn ; but in one's thoughts one takes such known facts for granted without any opinion.

To leap into the midst of such complications all at once is very hard for a young soul. Ordinarily, the girl to whom it suddenly becomes apparent that she may be called upon to give up her love, has at least something to

rest upon in the way of compensation ; when it is in fiction, she has to save her father from ruin, and often it happens in real life that the delight of all her friends, the approbation of her parents, the satisfaction of all who love her, is the reward for her sacrifice. But poor Winifred was without any such consolation. If she gave up her happiness for the sake of retaining and restoring their inheritance to her brothers, they would revile her in the meantime, and take it as the mere restitution of something stolen from them, in the future. Or she might find that the inheritance came to her under restrictions which made her sacrifice useless, and her desire to do justice impossible. What was she then to do? There came into her mind a sudden wish that Edward was still as he was six months ago, vehement, impatient, almost desperate. Oh, if he would but take the matter into his own hands, risk everything,

carry her away, make it impossible once for all that she should be the one who had to set all right! She said to herself that she ought to have consented when he had urged this upon her. Why should she have hesitated? They had been held in suspense for two years, a long time in which to exercise patience, to linger on the threshold of life. And it was not as if her father wanted her love, or would feel his house vacant and miserable without her. He who could cut off his sons without a compunction had never shown any particular love for his daughter. His thoughts were concentrated upon himself. She was not so necessary to him as old Hopkins was, who understood all his tastes.

When Winifred suffered herself for a moment to think of herself, to leap in imagination from Bedloe, with all its luxuries, from the sombre life at home, undisturbed now by any joyous

expectation of the boys, with no hope even of family letters that would afford anything but pain—to the doctor's little house full of sunshine and pleasantness, the life of two which is the perfection of individual existence—her heart, too, seemed to leap out of her bosom towards that other world. Oh, if she could but be liberated without any action of her own, carried away, transported from her own dim life to that of him to whom above all others she belonged! This flight of fancy lifted her up in a momentary exaltation above all her troubles. Then she tumbled down, down to the dust. She knew very well it would not be. He could not, even if he wished it, which now it seemed he did not, carry her away without consulting her, without her consent. And she could never give that consent. She could not abandon her home, her duties, the possibility of serving her brothers, the necessity of serving

her father. One must act according to one's nature, however clearly one may see a happier way, however certain one may be of the inefficiency of self-denial. Sometimes even duty becomes a kind of immorality, a servile consent to the tyranny of others; but still to the dutiful it is a bond which cannot be broken. Winifred felt herself look on like a spectator, and sadly assent to the possible destruction of her own life and all her hopes. It might be delayed, it might not come at all, but still it was impending over her, and she did not know how she was to escape, even in that one impossible way.

She had reached the edge of the park without knowing it in the fulness of her preoccupation, when the sound of a dog-cart coming along the road awoke her attention. It was no wonderful thing that Edward should be passing at that moment, though she had not

thought of it. Neither was it extraordinary that he should throw the reins to his servant and join her. "I have just time to walk back with you," he said.

CHAPTER VI

IT was scarcely in nature that the appearance of her betrothed, coming so suddenly in the midst of her thoughts, should be disagreeable to Winifred, but it was an embarrassment to her, and rather added to than lessened the trouble on her mind. He led her back into the park, which she had been coming out of, scarcely knowing where she wandered. As was his way when they were beyond the reach of curious eyes, he took her arm instead of offering her his. There was something more caressing, more close in this manner of contact. When they were safe beyond all interruption, he bent over her tenderly.

"Something is the matter," he said.

"Nothing new, Edward."

"Only the trouble of yesterday, Tom's going away?"

"It is not the trouble of yesterday. It is a trouble which lasts, which is going on, which may never come to an end. I don't think you can say of any trouble that it is only of yesterday."

"That is very true; still, you and I are not given to philosophising, Winnie, and I thought there might be some new incident. I suppose he sails to-day?"

"Yes, he sails to-day: and when will he come back again? Will he ever come back? The two of them? Oh, Edward, life is very hard, very different from what one thought."

"At your age people are seldom so much mixed up in it. But there is the good as well as the bad."

"Perhaps," said the girl, faltering, "I am looking through spectacles, not rose-coloured, all the other way. I don't see very much of the good."

He pressed her arm close to his side.

"Am not I a little bit of good; is not our life all good if it were only once begun?"

"But what if it never begins?"

"Winnie!" he cried, startled, standing still and drawing her suddenly in front of him so that he could look into her face.

"Oh, Edward, don't add to my troubles; I don't see how it is ever to begin. My father means to put me in Tom's place, as he put Tom in George's place, and already he has said"—

"What has he said?"

"Perhaps it means nothing," she went on after a pause; "I should have kept it to myself."

"Winnie, that is worse than anything he can have said. What he says I can bear, but not that you should keep anything to yourself."

"It was not much. It was a sort of a threat. He said the match that was good enough for Winnie might not be good enough for"—

"His heiress. He is right enough," young Langton said.

At this, Winifred, who had been anticipating in her own mind all that was involved, trembled as if it had never occurred to her before, and turned upon him with an air, and indeed with the most real sentiment of grieved surprise.

"Right?" she said, with wonder and reproach in her voice.

"A country doctor," said the young man, "a fellow with nothing, is not a match for the

heiress of Bedloe. He is right enough. We cannot contradict him. You ought to make an alliance like a princess with some one like yourself."

"I did not think," said Winnie, raising her head with a flush of anger, "that you would have been the one to make it all worse."

He smiled upon her, still holding her closely by the arm. "Did you think I had not thought of that before now? Of course, from his point of view, and, of course, from all points of view except our own, Winnie"—

"I am glad you make that exception."

"It is very magnanimous of me to do so, and you will have to be all the more good to me. I am not blind, and I have seen it all coming, from the moment of Tom's failure. Why was he so silly as to fail,

when a hundred boobies get through every year?"

"Poor Tom!" she said, with a little gush of tears.

"Yes; poor Tom! I suppose he never for a moment thought— But, for my part, I have seen it coming. I have seen for a long time what way the tide was turning. At first there was not much thought of you; you were only the little girl in the house. If it had not been so, I should have run away, I should not have run my head into the net, and exposed myself to certain contempt and rejection. But I saw that nobody knew there was in the house an angel unawares."

"Edward, you make me ashamed! You know how far I am"—

"From being an angel? I hope so, Winnie. If I saw the wings budding, I should get out my instruments and clip them: it would be

a novel sort of an operation. I thought their ignorance was my opportunity."

She was partly mollified, partly alarmed. "You did not think all this before you let yourself—care for me, Edward?"

"I did before I allowed myself to tell you that I—cared for you, as you say. One does not do such a thing without thinking. There was a time when I thought that I must give up the splendid practice of Bedloe, with Shippington into the bargain; the rich appointment of parish doctor, the fat fees of the Union"—

"You can laugh at it," she said, "but it is very, very serious to me."

"And so it is very, very serious to me. So much so that six months ago I wanted to throw everything up, if you would only have consented to come with me, and seek our fortune, I did not mind where"—

"Ah!" she said. There was in the exclamation a world of wistful meaning. What an escape it would have been from all after peril! Winifred said this with the slight shiver of one who sees the means of safety which she could never have taken advantage of.

"But now," he said, "it is too late for that."

His tone of conviction went to Winifred's heart like a stone. She would never have consented to it; but yet why did he say it was too late? She gave him a wistful glance, but asked no question. To do so would have been contrary to her pride and every feeling. They went on for a few minutes in silence, she more cast down than she could explain—he adding nothing to what he had said. Why did he add nothing? Things could not be left now as they were, without mutual explanation and decision what they were to do. Too late? She felt in her

heart, on the contrary, that now was the only moment in which it could have been done, in which she could have wound herself up to the possibility—if it were not for other possibilities, which, alas! would thrust themselves into the way.

“I have something to tell you,” he said, “something which you will think makes everything worse. I might have kept you in ignorance of it, as I have been doing; but the knowledge must come some time, and it will explain what I have said”—

She withdrew a little from him, and drew herself up to all the height she possessed, which was not very much. There went to her heart a quick dart like the stab of a knife. She thought he was about to tell her that his own mind had changed, or that her coming wealth and importance had made it incompatible with his pride to continue their engagement. Something of this

kind it seemed certain that it must be. In the sudden conviction of the moment it did not occur to Winifred that such a new thing could scarcely be told while he held her so closely to him, and clasped her hand and arm so firmly. But it was not a moment for the exercise of reason. She did not look up, but she raised her head instinctively and made an effort to loosen her hand from his clasp. But of these half-involuntary movements he took no note, being fully occupied with what was in his mind.

“Winnie,” he said in a serious voice, “your father talks at his ease of making wills and changing the disposition of his property. I don’t suppose he thinks for a moment how near he may be—how soon these changes may come into effect.”

A little start, a little tremor ran through her frame. Her attitude of preparation for a blow

relaxed. She did not understand what he meant in the relief of perceiving that it was not what she thought.

"My father? I don't understand you, Edward."

"No, I scarcely expected you would. He looks what people call the picture of health."

She started now violently and drew her arm out of his in the shock of the first suggestion. "My father!" she stammered—"the picture of health—you do not mean, you cannot mean"—

"I have been cruel," he said, drawing tenderly her arm into his. "I have given you a great shock. My darling, it had to be done sooner or later. Your father, though he looks so well, is not well, Winnie. I never was satisfied that he got over that illness as he thought he did. But even I was not alarmed for a long time.

Now for several months I have been watching him closely. If he does not make this new will at once, he may never do it. If he does, it will not be long before you are called on to assume your place."

"Edward! you do not mean that my father— You don't mean that there is absolute danger—to his life—soon—now? Edward! you do not think"—

"Dear, you must show no alarm. You must learn to be quite calm. You must not betray your knowledge. It may be at any moment—to-day, to-morrow, no one can tell. It is not certain—nothing is certain—he may go on for a year."

The light seemed to fail in Winifred's eyes. She leant against her lover with a rush and whirl of hurrying thoughts that seemed to carry away her very life. It was not the awful sensation of a calamity from which there is no

escape, such as often overwhelms the tender soul when first brought face to face with death ; but rather a horrible sense of what that doom would be to him, the cutting off of everything in which, so far as she knew, he took any pleasure or ever thought of. The idea of a spiritual life beyond would not come into any accordance with her consciousness of him. Mr. Chester was one of those men whom it is impossible to think of as entering into rest, or attaining immediate felicity by the sudden step of death. There are some people whom the imagination refuses to connect with any surroundings but those of prosaic humanity. They must die, too, like the most spiritually-minded ; but there comes upon the soul a sensation of moral vertigo when we think of them as entering the life of an unseen world. This, though it may seem unnatural to say so, was the first sensation of Winifred, a sense of horror and alarm, an

immediate realisation of the terrible inappropriateness of such a removal. What would become of him when removed from earth, the only state of existence with which he had any affinities? It sent a shiver over her, a chill sense of the unknown and unimaginable which seemed to freeze the blood in her veins. It was only when she recovered from this that natural feeling gained utterance. She had leant against her lover in that first giddiness, with her head swimming, her strength giving way. She came slowly back to herself, feeling his arm which supported her with a curious beatific sense that everything was explained between him and her, mingled with the sensation of natural grief and dismay.

"I do not feel as if it could be possible," she said faintly. Then, with trembling lips, "My father?" and melted into tears.

“My dearest, it is right you should know. It is for this reason I have tried to persuade you not to go against him in anything. The more tranquillity he has, the better are his chances for life. Let him do as he threatens. Perhaps if you withdraw all opposition he will delay the making of another will, as almost all men do—for there seems time enough for such an operation, and nothing to hurry for. Get him into this state of mind if you can, Winnie. Don’t oppose him; let it be believed that you see the justice of his intention, that you are willing to do what he pleases.”

“Even”— she said, and looked up at him, pausing, unable to say more.

He took both her hands in his, and looked at her, smiling. “Even,” he said, “to the length of allowing him to believe that you have given up a man that was never half good enough for

you ; but who believes in you all the same like heaven."

"Believes in me—when I pretend to give up what I don't give up, and pretend to accept what I don't accept? Is that the kind of woman you believe in?" she cried, drawing away her hands. "How can I do so? How can I consent to cheat my father, and he perhaps—perhaps"—

She stood faltering, trembling, crying, but detaching herself with nervous force from his support, in a passion of indignation and trouble and dismay.

He answered her with a line in which is the climax of heart-rending tragedy, holding out to her the hands from which she had escaped—

"Faith unfaithful kept him falsely true."

That may do for poetry," she said ; "but for me, I am not great enough or grand enough

to—to—to be able to brave it. Edward, do not ask me. I must tell the truth. If I tried to do anything else, my face, my looks would betray me. Oh, don't be so hard on me. Ask me something less than this, ask me now to"—

She stopped terror-stricken, not knowing what she had said; but he only looked at her tenderly, shaking his head. "If I had ever persuaded you to that," he said, "I should have been a cad and a rascal, for it would have broken your heart. But now I should be worse—I might be a murderer. Winnie, you must yield for his sake. You must let him live as long as God permits."

"And deceive him?" she said, almost inaudibly. "Oh, you don't know what you are asking of me! You are asking too much cleverness, too much power. I can only say one thing or another. I cannot be falsely true."

"You can do everything that is necessary, whatever it may be, for those you love," he said.

She stood faltering before him for a moment, turning her eyes from one side to the other, as if in search of help. But there was nothing that could give her any aid. The heavens seemed to close in above her, and the earth to disappear from under her feet. If she had ever consented to an untruth in her life, it had been to shield and excuse her brothers, for whom there were always apologies to be made. And how to deceive she knew not.

They went on together across the park, not noticing the wetness of the grass or the threatening of the sky, upon which clouds were once more blowing up for rain, so much absorbed in their consultation that they were close to the house before they were aware, and started like

guilty things surprised when Mr. Chester came sharply upon them round a corner, buttoned up to the chin, and with an umbrella in his hand.

CHAPTER VII

“WHY don’t you come to the house and have your talk out? She has got her feet wet, and if she does not look sharp, we shall all be caught in the rain—a doctor should know better than to expose a young lady to bronchitis. Besides, her life is more important than it ever was before.”

“We forgot how the skies were looking. You should not be out of doors either; it is worse for you than for her. I told you this morning you had a cold.”

“You are always telling me I have a cold.

I shan't live a day the less for that," said Mr. Chester, with a jauntiness which made Winifred's heart sick.

"I hope not, but we must take care," said young Langton. "Come back now—don't go any farther. I hope you were coming only to bring Miss Chester back."

"I was coming to bring Miss Chester back—and for other things," said her father significantly. He put a little emphasis on the name, and Winifred had already been painfully affected by hearing her name pronounced so formally by her lover. He had never addressed her familiarly in her father's presence, but now there seemed a meaning in everything, and as her father repeated it, there seemed in it a whole new world and new disposition of affairs. "But as it is going to be a wet night," he added, "and we shall have a dull time of it, nothing but myself and

two females at dinner, you had better come and dine with us, doctor, if you have nothing better to do."

"I will come with pleasure," Langton said. He had perfect command of himself, and yet he could not refrain from a momentary glance at Winifred, which said much.

She, too, divined, with a sinking of her heart, that it was not merely for dinner, or to relieve himself from the society of "two females," that her father gave the invitation. He was unusually gracious and smiling.

"You know you're always welcome," he said. "The ladies spoil you. A young doctor is something like a curate, he is always spoiled by the ladies; but they shan't have so much of your company as they expect, for I have got several things to talk to you about."

"As many as you like," said Langton, "but let me entreat you to go in now."

"You see how anxious our friend is about my health, Winnie; he does not care half so much for yours, and you are a deal more liable to take cold than ever I was. You take that from your mother, who was always a feeble creature. The stamina is on the Chester side. Very well, doctor, very well. I don't like the wet any more than you do. I'm going in, don't be afraid. Dinner at seven, sharp, and don't keep us waiting."

Mr. Chester's laugh seemed to the young pair to mean much; the very wave of his hand as he turned away, his insistence upon the hour of dinner, all breathed of fate. The two young people exchanged one look as they shook hands; on his side it was a look at once of encouragement and entreaty—on hers of terror and wistfulness. She was afraid and

yet anxious to be left alone with her father. It seemed to Winifred that she could bear what he said to herself, however painful it might be, but that an insulting dismissal of Edward was more than she could bear. She could not linger, however, nor say a word to him beyond what ordinary civility required. Even the momentary pause did not pass without remark.

"Some last words?" Mr. Chester said; "one would think you had seen enough of each other. You should make your appointments a little earlier in the day."

"It was no appointment, papa. I was walking, and Dr. Langton came up in his dog-cart."

"Oh, very likely; these things fall in so pat, don't they? I suppose I am past the age for encountering people in dog-carts just when I want them. But you must not calculate

too much on that," he said with a laugh. "There's no reason why I shouldn't marry and provide myself with another family, that might be more to my mind than you."

To this Winnie made no reply. The threat had offended her on other occasions; now it affected her with that dreadful sense of the intolerable to which words can give no expression; it brought the blood in a rush to her face, and she looked at him in spite of herself with eyes in which pity and horror were mingled. He met her look with a laugh.

"You are horrified, are you? That's all very well for you; but let me tell you, many an older man than I, and less pleasing, perhaps, has got a pretty young wife before now. It has to be paid for, like every other luxury; but women are plenty, my dear, though you mayn't think so."

"Papa, do you think this is a subject to discuss with me?"

"Why not? You are the only one except myself that would be much affected by it. It might interfere with your comforts, and it would interfere very much with your importance, I can tell you, Miss Winnie."

"Then, father," the girl said, "for Heaven's sake do it, and don't talk of it any more. Rather that a thousand times than to be forced to agree to what I abhor, than to be put in another's place, than to have to give up"—

He turned round and looked at her somewhat sternly. "What do you expect to be obliged to give up?" he said.

Between her fear of doing harm to him, whose tranquillity she had been charged to preserve, and her fear of precipitating matters

and bringing upon herself at once the prohibition she feared—and that natural nervous desire to forestall a catastrophe which was entirely contradictory of the other sentiments, Winifred paused and replied to him with troubled looks rather than with speech. When she found her voice, she answered, faltering—

“What you said to me yesterday, meant giving up the truth and all I have ever cared for in my life. I have always wanted, desired, more than my life, to be of use to—the boys—and to be made to appear as if I were against them”—

Her voice was interrupted with sobs. Ah, but was not this the beginning of treachery? It was the truth, but not the whole truth; the boys were much, but there was something which was still more. Already in the first outset and beginning she was but falsely true.

"This is all about the boys, is it?" he said coldly—"as you call them. I should say the men—who have taken their own way, and had their own will, and like it, I hope. If it comes to a bargain between you and me, Winnie, there must be something more than that."

"There can be no bargain between you and me," said Winifred. In the meantime, looking at him, she had thought his colour varied, and that a slight stumble he made over a stone was a sign of weakness; and her heart sank with sudden compunction. "Oh, no bargain, papa! It is yours to tell me what to do, and mine to—to obey you." Her voice weakened and grew low as she said these words. She felt as if it were a solemn promise she was making, instead of the most ordinary of dutiful speeches. He nodded his head repeatedly as she spoke.

"That's as it should be, Winnie,—that's as it should be; continue like that, my dear, and you shall hear no more of the new wife. So long as you are reasonable, I am quite content with my daughter, who does me credit. It is your duty to do me credit. I am going to do a great deal for you, and I have more claim than just the ordinary claim. Go in now, the rain's coming. As for me, for all that young fellow says, I don't believe it matters. I feel as fit as ever I did in my life. Still, bronchitis is a nuisance," he added, coughing a little, as he followed her indoors.

Winifred did not appear again till the hour of dinner. She was, like every one who hears a sentence of death for the first time, apprehensive that the event which seemed at one moment incredible might happen the next, and she stole along the corridor at least half a

dozen times, to make sure that her father was in the room called the library, in which he read his newspapers. If any sound was heard in the silence of the house, she conjured up terrible visions of a sudden fall and catastrophe.

How was it possible to oppose him in anything? If he told her to abandon Edward, she would have to reply — as if he had asked her to go out for a walk, or drive with him in his' carriage—"Yes, papa." It would not matter what he asked, she must make the same answer, conventional, meaning as little as if it had^e been a request for a cup of tea. And about his will the same assent would have to be necessary. She must appear to him and to the world to be very willing to supplant her brothers; she must appear to give up her lover because now she was too great and too

rich to marry a poor man. This was the charge her lover himself had laid upon her. She must consent to everything. The true feelings of her mind, and all her intentions and hopes, must be laid aside, and she must appear as if she were another woman, a creature influenced by the will of others without any of her own.

Even that was a possible position. A girl might give up all natural will and impulse. She might be a passive instrument in other people's hands. She might take passively what was given to her, and passively allow something else to be taken away: that might be weak, miserable, and unworthy — but it need not be false. What was required of her was more than this. It was required of her that she should pretend to be all this till her father should die, and then turn round and deceive him in his grave. The thought

made Winifred shiver with a chill which penetrated her very heart. After, could she undo all she had done, baulk him after he was dead, proclaim to all the world that she had deceived him? Was that what Edward meant by being falsely true? She said to herself that she could not do it, that it would be impossible. In the case of her brothers, perhaps, where only renunciation was necessary, she might do it; but to gain happiness for herself she could not do it. "I cannot, I cannot!" she cried to herself under her breath; and then lower still, with an anguish of resolution and determination, "I will not!" If she gave him up, it should be for ever. She would not play a part, and pretend submission, and deceive.

But, to the astonishment of both these young people, Mr. Chester that evening did not say

a word on the subject. During dinner he was more agreeable than usual; but when the ladies went out of the room, young Langton, as he met the eyes of his betrothed, gave her a look which told that he knew what was coming. He was so nervous when he was left behind that for the first few minutes he hardly knew what was being said to him; but when he calmed down and came to himself, an astonished sense that nothing was being said took the place of his dread, and bewildered him altogether. All that Mr. Chester had to say was to ask for some information about a small estate which was to be sold in another part of the country which was better known to the doctor than to himself. He asked his advice, indeed, as to whether he should or should not become its purchaser, in a way which made young Langton's head go round, for it was the

manner of a man who was consulting one of those who were concerned, an intimate friend, perhaps a son-in-law. He said to himself, after a moment, when this subject was exhausted, that now it must be coming. But, on the contrary, there was not a word.

When the two gentlemen went into the drawing-room, Winifred asked him with her eyes a question which was full of the anguish of suspense. He managed behind the cover of a book to say to her, "Nothing has been said;" but this was so wonderful that the relief was too much, and neither could she believe in that. They both felt that the pause, though almost miraculous, could not be real, and that the coming storm was all the more certain because of this delay.

Late that night Mr. Chester felt unwell, and

sent into the village for the doctor just as he was going to bed. Langton put on his coat, and jumped into the dog-cart which had been sent for him, with a sudden quickening of all his pulses, and the sense of a miraculous escape more distinctly in his mind than solicitude for his patient. Winifred met him at the door with wild anxiety and terror, and followed him to her father's room, with all her nerves strung for the great and terrible event of which she had been warned. She thought nothing less than that the hour of calamity had come, and the whole house was moved with a vague horror of anticipation, although no one knew that there was anything to fear. The doctor's practised eye, however, saw in a moment that it was a false alarm, and it was with a pang almost of disappointment that he reassured her. He could only appear glad, but there was no doubt in his own mind that it was a distinct mistake

of Providence. Had Mr. Chester died then, he would have left the world with one or two sins the less on his conscience, and a great deal of human misery would have been spared.

"You think I should not have roused you out of your comfortable bed without the excuse of dying, or at least something more in it?" the patient said; "but you will find I am a tough customer, and likely to give you more trouble before you are done with me."

"It is no trouble," the doctor said, with a grave face; "but you must learn to be careful."

"Pshaw!" said the rich man. "I tell you I am a tough customer. It is not a bit of an evening walk that will free you of me."

"We will do our best to fortify you for

evening walks ; but you must be careful,"
Langton said.

Upon which his patient gave a chuckle, and
turned round in his bed and went to sleep like
a two-years child.

CHAPTER VIII

A THREATENED life is said to last long. Winifred Chester lived in great alarm and misery for a week or two, watching every movement and every look of her father, expecting almost to see him fall and die before her very eyes. The horror of a catastrophe which she could not avert, which nothing could be done to stave off, intensified the natural feeling which makes the prospect of another's death, even of an indifferent person, overawing and terrible. And though it was impossible to believe that a man like Mr. Chester could inspire his daughter with that impassioned filial love which many daughters bear to their

parents, yet he was her father, and all the habits of her life were associated with him : so that the idea of his sudden removal conveyed almost as great a shock to her mind as if the warmest bonds of love, instead of a natural affection much fretted by involuntary judgments given in her heart against him, had been the bond between them.

And there can be nothing in the world more dreadful to the mind than to watch the life and actions of a human creature whom we know to be on the brink of the grave, but who neither suspects nor anticipates any danger, and lives every day as though he were to live for ever. To hear him say what he was going to do in the time to come, the changes he meant to make, the improvements, the new furnishings, the plantings, all that was to be done during the next ten years, filled Winifred with a thrill of misery which was not unmingled

with compunction. Could she say nothing to him, give him no hint, whisper in his ear no intimation that his days were numbered? She shrank within herself at the thought of presuming to do so; and yet to be with him and walk by him, and listen to all his anticipations, and never do it, seemed horrible. All his thoughts were of the world in which he had, as he did not know, so precarious a footing. He was a man who wanted no other, whose horizon was bounded by the actual, whose aspirations did not exceed what human life could give him. He had met with disappointments and probably had felt them as bitterly as other men, but his active spirit had never been arrested, he had turned to something else in which he expected compensation. The something else at present was Winifred; she had done him credit, and might do so still in a higher degree than had been possible to her brothers. She might marry

anybody. As for the doctor, when the moment came, Mr. Chester knew very well how to make short work of the doctor. And Winnie, of whom there could be no doubt that she was a lady, should marry a lord and satisfy her father's pride, and make up for everything.

His mind had taken refuge in this with an elasticity which minds of higher tone and better inspirations do not always possess; and those plans which to her were so frightful, those arrangements of years which he should never see, were all with a view to this satisfaction which he had promised himself. He was going to preserve the game strictly, a duty which he had not much thought of hitherto: he was going to enlarge the house — to build a new wing for my lord, as he began within himself to name his unknown son-in-law. In these

arrangements he forgot his own sons, putting them aside altogether, as if they had never existed, and forgot also, or at least never took into consideration, any uncertainty in life, any thought of consolations less positive.

To see a man so terribly off his guard is always a spectacle very terrible and surprising when the mind of the spectator is roused to it, just as the sight of any indifferent passer-by going lightly along a road on which death awaits him round the next corner, is almost more appalling than the sight of death itself, especially if we cannot warn him or do anything to save. And how could he die? A man who cared for nothing that was not in the life he knew, how was he to adapt himself to another, to anything so different? Winifred's brain swam, the light faded before her as she sat watching him, unable to take

her eyes from him, full of terror, compassion, pity.

"What are you staring at so?" he asked on more than one occasion.

"Nothing, papa," Winifred replied incoherently, consciousness suddenly coming back to her as his voice broke the giddiness and throng of intolerable thoughts.

"One would think you saw a ghost behind me," he said, with a laugh. "That's the new æsthetic fashion of absent-mindedness, I suppose;" and this explanation satisfied and even pleased him, for he wished Winnie to be of the latest fashion and "up to everything" with the best.

Miss Farrell, on the other hand, scolded her pupil, as much as she could scold any one, for this sudden alarm which had seized her. "It is just a fad," the old lady said. "Edward has his fads like other people: doctors have; they

are fond of a discovery that leads to nothing. I never saw your dear father look better in his life."

"He does not look ill," Winifred allowed, with a faint movement of relief.

"Ill? he looks strong, younger than he did five years ago, and such a colour, and an excellent appetite. But I am glad to hear that is what Edward thinks, for it explains everything."

"Glad?" it was Winifred's turn to exclaim.

"My dear, when you are my age you will know that one is sometimes glad of an explanation of things that have puzzled one, even though the explanation itself is not cheerful. I think this fright of Edward's is a piece of folly, but yet it explains many things. As for your dear father, if he were a little unwell from time to time, that would be nothing to wonder

at. Gout, for instance—one is always prepared for gout in a man of his age. But he is up early and late, he has the complexion of a ploughboy, and can eat everything without even a thought of his digestion. I envy him,” she said, with fervour. Then, giving Winifred a kiss as she leant over her, “You are seeing everything *en noir*, my dear, and Edward is giving in to you. Don’t think any more about it for three days; in the meantime I will watch him; give me three days, and promise me to be happy in the meantime.”

This time Winifred did not repeat the inappropriate expression, but only looked at her old friend with tears in her eyes. “I don’t think I have very much to be happy about,” she said.

“You have life before you, and youth and hope; and you have Edward; and your dear father, so far as I can see, in perfect health;

and the others—in the hands of Providence Winnie.”

“Are we not all in the hands of Providence,” said the girl; “those who live and those who die, those who do well and those who do ill? and it does not seem to make any difference.”

“That is because we see such a little way, such a little way — never what to-morrow is going to bring forth,” Miss Farrell said.

But this conversation did not do very much to reassure Winifred, and at the end of the three days the old lady said nothing. Her experienced eyes saw, after a close investigation, certain trifles which brought her to the young doctor’s opinion, or at least made her acknowledge to herself that he might possibly be right. It is to be feared that Miss Farrell did not look upon this possibility with horror. She was

calmer, not so much interested, and less full of that instinctive horror and awe of death which is most strong in the young. She had seen a great many people die ; perhaps she was not for that more reconciled to the idea of it in her own person than others ; but she had come to look upon it with composure where others were concerned. She thought it likely enough that Edward might be right ; and she thought that, perhaps, this was not the conclusion which would be most regrettable. It would leave Winifred free. If he did not alter his will, it would restore the boys to their rights ; and if he did alter his will, Winifred would restore them to their rights. On making a balance of the greatest happiness of the greatest number, no doubt it would be for the best that Mr. Chester should end his career.

After these three days, at the end of which Winifred asked no explanation from her friend,

many other days followed, with nothing happening. The force of the impression was softened in her mind, and though the appearance of Mr. Chester's man of business on two or three several occasions gave her a renewed thrill of terror, yet her father said nothing on the subject of his will, and she was glad on her side to ignore it, feeling that nothing she could say or do would have any effect upon his resolution. On the last evening, when Mr. Babington, after a long afternoon with Mr. Chester in the library, stayed to dinner, the cheerfulness and satisfaction of the master of the house were visible to everybody. He had the best wine in his cellar out for his old friend, and talked to him all the evening of "old days," as he said, days when he himself had little expectation of ever being the Squire of Bedloe.

"But many things have changed since that time," he added, "and the last is first and

the first last, eh, Babington, in more senses than one."

"Yes, in more senses than one," the lawyer said gravely, sipping the old port which had been disinterred for him with an aspect not half so jovial as that of his patron, though it was wine such as seldom appears at any table in these degenerate days.

"In more senses than one," Mr. Chester repeated. "Fill your glass again, old Bab ; and, Miss Farrell, stay a moment, and let me give you a little wine, for I am going to propose a toast."

"I am not in the habit of drinking toasts," said Miss Farrell, who had risen from her chair ; "but as I am sure it is one which a lady need not hesitate about, since you propose it"—

"No lady need hesitate," said Mr. Chester, "for it is to one that is a true lady, as good a

lady as if she had royal blood in her veins. You would not better her, I can tell you, if you were to search far and wide ; and as you have had some share in making her what she is, Miss Farrell, it stands to reason you should have a share in her advancement. I have a great mind to call in all the servants and make them drink it too."

"Don't," said the lawyer hurriedly ; "a thing is well enough among friends that is not fit for strangers, or servants either. For my part, I wish everything that is good to Miss Winifred ; but yet"—

"Hold your tongue, Babington ; it is none of your business. Here's the very good health of the heiress of Bedloe, and good luck to her, and a fine title and a handsome husband, and everything that heart can desire."

The two ladies had risen, and still stood, Miss

Farrell with the glass of wine which Mr. Chester had given her in her hand, Winifred standing very straight by the table, and white as the dress she wore. Miss Farrell grew pale too, gazing from one to the other of the two gentlemen, who drank their wine, one with a flushed and triumphant countenance, the other in little thoughtful gulps. "I can't refuse to drink the health of Winifred, however it is put," she said tremulously. "But if this is what you mean, Mr. Chester"—

"Yes, my old girl," cried Mr. Chester, "this is what I mean; and I don't know what anybody can have to say against it—you, in particular, that have brought her up, and done your duty by her, I must say. She has always been a good friend to you, and always will be. I can answer for her, and you shall never want a home as long as she has one. But if you have

anything to say against my arrangements, or what I mean to do for her"—

Miss Farrell put down the wine with a hand that trembled slightly. She towered into tremulous height, or so it seemed to the lookers-on. "I say nothing about the term which you have permitted yourself to apply to me, Mr. Chester," she said. "I can make allowance for bad breeding; but if you think you can prevent me from forming an opinion, and expressing it"—

"Be quiet, Chester," cried the lawyer, kicking him under the table; but in the height of his triumph he was not to be kept down.

"You may form your opinions as you please, and express them too; but, by George! if you express anything about my affairs, or take it upon you to criticise, it will have to be in some one else's house."

"That is quite enough," said the old lady. "I am not in the habit of receiving affronts. This day is the last I shall spend in your house. I bid you good evening, Mr. Babington." She waved her hand majestically as she went away. As for Winnie, who had endeavoured to stop him with an indignant cry of "Father!" she turned upon Mr. Chester a pair of eyes, large and full of woe, which blazed out of her pale face in passionate protestation as she hurried after her friend. The exit of the ladies was so sudden after this swift and hot interchange of hostilities that it left the two men confounded. Mr. Chester gave vent to an exclamation or two, and turned to his supporter on the other side.

"What did I say?" he cried. "I haven't said anything, have I, to make a tragedy about?"

"It would have been a great deal better

to say nothing at all," was all the comfort Babington gave him. The lawyer went on with the port, which was very good. He thought quarrels were always a nuisance, but that Chester did indeed—there could be no doubt of it—want some one to take him down a peg or two.

"If your daughter does not much like it herself, as seems to be the case, it's a pity to set the old lady on to make her worse. And Miss Winifred wants a lady with her," he said between the gulps.

He gave no support to the angry man, hot with excitement and triumph, to whom this sudden check had come in the midst of his outburst of angry satisfaction.

Mr. Chester's countenance fell.

"You don't mean," he cried, "that she will be such a fool as to go away? Pshaw! she's not such a fool as that. She knows on what

side her bread's buttered. She's lived at Bedloe these dozen years."

"Everybody knows Miss Farrell," said the lawyer. "She's as proud as Lucifer, and as fiery, if she is set ablaze."

"Pooh!" said the other; "it is nothing but a breeze; we'll be all right again to-morrow. She knows me, and I know her. She is not such a fool as to throw away a comfortable home, because I called her old girl. Are you determined, after all, that you won't stay the night?"

"I must get home—I must indeed. To-morrow early I have half a dozen appointments."

"Then, if you will go," said Mr. Chester,—
"which I take unkind of you, for, of course, the appointments could stand, if you chose;—but if you must go, it's time for your train."

"Thank you for telling me," said Mr.

Babington. He jumped up with a slight resentment, though he had been quite determined about going away that night; but then he had not known that there would be this quarrel, which he should have liked to see the end of, or that the port would be so good.

CHAPTER IX

THE sound of the brougham rolling along down the avenue, and of the closing of the great door upon the departing guest, came to Winifred, as she sat alone, with a dreary sound. Mr. Babington was no particular ally of hers, and yet it felt like the going away of a friend. Presently her father came into the room, talking over his shoulder to old Hopkins about the hot water and lemons which were to be placed in the library ready for him. "Ten o'clock will do," he said. It was only about nine, and Winifred felt, not with transport, that she was to have her father's society for the next hour. It was by this time too warm to have a

fire in the evening, but yet they sat habitually, when the lamp was lighted, near the fireplace. Mr. Chester came up to this central spot, and drew a chair near to his daughter and sat down. He brought a smell of wine with him, and a sensation of heat and excitement. "Why are you sitting by yourself," he said, "like a sparrow on the housetop? It seems to me you are always alone."

"I shall have to be alone in future, papa. Miss Farrell"—Winifred could not say any more for the sob in her throat.

"Oh, this is too much!" said Mr. Chester. "Couldn't she or any one see that I was a little excited? She must know I don't mean any harm. That is all nonsense, Winnie. You shall say something pretty to her from me, and make an end of it. Why, what's all this fuss about a hasty word? She *is* an old girl if you come to that— But I don't want any

botheration now. I want everything to be straight and pleasant. We are going to have company, people staying in the house, and you can't do without her, that is clear."

"Oh, papa," said Winifred, "I wish you would not have any one staying in the house. I don't know what you meant to-night, but if it is anything about me, I—I don't feel able for company. It is so short a time since poor Tom"—

"You had better let poor Tom alone. I want to hear nothing more of him," said the father. "Mind what I say. I mean to make a lady of you, Winnie; but if you turn upon me like the rest, I am just as fit to do the same to you."

"I would rather you did than have what should be theirs," said Winifred. Her heart was beating wildly in her breast with apprehension and dismay, and she could not be

prudent as she had been bidden to be, nor consent to be what was so odious to her; but even in the warmth of her protest Edward's words occurred to her, and she faltered and stopped, with an alarmed look at her father. He was flushed, and his eyes were fiery and red.

"You are going a little too fast," he said. "It is neither theirs nor yours, but mine; and I should like to know who has any right to take it from me. Now that we've begun on this subject, we'll have it out, Winnie. You've been having your own way more than was good for you. Perhaps, after all, Miss Farrell, who has let you do as you pleased, can go, and somebody else be got who knows better what is suitable to a young lady like you. I can have no more flirtations with doctors, or curates, or that sort. You are old enough to be married, and I want no more nonsense. That sort of thing, though

it means nothing, is bad for a girl settling in life."

Winifred had turned from white to red, sitting gazing at him, yet shrinking from his eyes. "Papa," she said, "I don't know what you mean," in a voice so low and troubled that he curved his hand over his ear, half in pretence, half in sincerity, to hear what she had to say.

"What I mean?—oh, that is very easy—you are not a child any longer, and you must throw aside childish things. I have asked a few people for the week after next. It's too early for the country, but I know some that are soon tired of town; and there is a young fellow among them who—well, who is very well disposed towards you, and well worth your catching were you twenty times an heiress. So I hope you'll mind what you're about, and play your cards well, and make me father-in-law to an earl.

That's all that I require of you, my dear ; and it's more for your own advantage than mine, when all is said."

He was very much flushed, she thought, and his eyes almost starting from his head. Terror seized her, as though some dreadful catastrophe might happen before her eyes. "Papa," she said, with an effort, "this is all very new, and there is so much to think of. Please let it be for to-morrow. There has been so much to-night—my head is quite confused, and I don't seem to understand what you say."

"You shall understand what I say, and it is better to be clear about it once for all. Here is the young Earl coming, as I tell you. He would suit me very well, and I mean him to suit you, so let us have no nonsense. If Miss Farrell thinks fit to leave you just when you want her, she is an ungrateful old— But we'll find another woman. I mean everything

to be on a right footing when these people turn up."

"Papa, of course I shall do all I can to—please your friends."

"Well, that's the first step," he said. "And it's very much for your own advantage. You would not be my daughter if you did not think of that."

She made no reply. If this was all, she was pledging herself to nothing, she thought, with natural inconsistency. But Mr. Chester was not satisfied. He drew his chair close, so that the odour of his wine and the excitement in his mind seemed to make a haze in the air around.

"And look here, Winnie. It doesn't suit me to send Edward Langton away. He's been a fool in respect to you, and you've been a fool, and so have I, for not putting a stop to it at once. But the fellow knows what's what better

than most. And he knows my constitution. I am not going to part with him as a doctor because he's been a presuming prig, and thought himself good enough for my daughter. It's for you to let him see that that's all over. Come, a word is as good as a wink."

"Father," Winnie said: she looked at him piteously, clasping her hands with the unconscious gesture of anguish—"oh, don't take everything from me in a moment!" she cried.

"What am I taking from you? I am giving you a fortune, a title probably, a husband far above anything you could have looked for."

"I want no one, papa, but you. Let me take care of you. I will ask for nothing but only to stay at home quietly and make you comfortable."

Mr. Chester pushed back his chair noisily with a loud exclamation. "Do you take me

for a fool?" he said. "Have I ever asked you to stay at home and make me comfortable? I can make myself comfortable, thank you. What I want is that you should do me credit. Your confounded humility and domesticity, and all that, may be very fine in a woman's novel. Taking care of her old father, the sweet girl! a ministering angel, and so forth. Do you think I go in for that sort of rubbish? I can make myself a deuced deal more comfortable than you could ever make me. Come, Winnie, no more of this folly. You can make me father-in-law to a British peer, and that is the sort of comfort I want."

His eyes were red with heat and excitement, the blood boiling in his veins. The girl's spirit was cowed as she looked at him, not by his violence, but by the signs of physical disturbance, which took all power from her.

"Oh, papa," she said, "don't say anything

more to-night! I am very unhappy. I will do anything rather than make you angry, rather than—disturb you. Have a little pity upon me, papa, and let me off for to-night.”

“To-night?” he said; “to-night ought to be the proudest day of your life. Who could ever have expected that you would be the heiress of Bedloe, a little chit of a girl? Most fathers would have married you off to the first comer that would take you and your little bit of fortune. But I have behaved very different. I have made you as good as an eldest son—not that I can’t take it all away again, as easily as I gave it, if you don’t do your best for me.”

He swayed forward a little as he spoke, in his excitement, and Winifred, whose terrified eyes were quite prepared to see him fall down at her feet, rose up hastily, with a little cry. She put out her hands unconsciously to support him.

"Oh, papa, I will do whatever you please!" she cried.

Mr. Chester pushed the outstretched hands away. "You think, perhaps, I want something to steady me," he said. "That's a delusion. I am as steady as you are, and more so, and know quite as well what I am saying. However, as long as you have come to your senses and obey me, that's all I care for. Look here, Winnie!" he said, again sitting down suddenly and pushing her back into her chair; "I don't want to be hard upon you. If old Farrell wants an apology I'll make it—to a certain extent. I meant no offence. She's very useful in her way. She's a lady, I always said so; and she's made you a lady, and I am grateful to her—more or less. You can say whatever's pretty on my part; or I'll even say a word myself, if you insist upon it. To have her go now would be deuced awkward. Tell her I meant no

offence. I was a little elevated, if you like. You may take away my character, if that will please her," he added, with a laugh. "Say what you like, I can bear it. Getting everything done as I wished had gone to my head."

"Oh, papa, if you had but wished something else! I am not—good enough. I am not—strong enough."

"Hold your tongue. I hope I'm the best judge of my own affairs," her father said. Then he yawned largely in her face. "I think I'll go and have my whisky and water. It is getting near bedtime, and I've had an exciting day, what with old Bab, and old Farrell, and you. I've been on the go from morning to night. But you've all got to knock under at the last," he added, nodding his head, "and the sooner the better, you'll find, my dear, if you have any sense."

Winifred sat and listened to his heavy step

as he went across the hall to the library and down the long corridor. It seemed to be irregular and heavier than its wont, and it was an effort of self-restraint not to follow him, to see that all was safe. When the door of his room closed behind him, which it did with a louder clang than usual, rousing all the echoes in the silent house, another terror seized her. Shut into that library, with no one near him, what might happen? He might fall and die without any one being the wiser; he might call with no one within hearing. She started to her feet, then sat down again trembling, not knowing what to do. She dared say nothing to him of the terror in her mind. She dared not set the servants to watch over him or take them into her confidence—even Hopkins, what could she say to him? But she could not go to her own room, which would be entirely out of the way of either sight or hearing. Sometimes

Mr. Chester would sit up late, after even Hopkins had gone to bed. The terror in her mind was so great that Winifred watched half the night, leaving the door of the drawing-room ajar, and sometimes starting out into the darkness of the hall, at one end of which a feeble light was kept burning. The hours went by very slowly while she thus watched and waited, trembling at all the creakings and rustlings of the night. She forgot the pledge she had given, the new life that was opening upon her in the midst of these terrors. Visions flitted before her mind, things which she had read in books of dead men sitting motionless, with the morning light coming in upon their pallid faces, or lying where they had fallen till some unthinking servant stumbled in the morning over the ghastly figure. It was long past midnight when the library door opened, and, shrinking back into the darkness, she saw her

father come out with his candle. He had probably fallen asleep in his chair, and the light glowing upon his face showed it pallid and wan after the flush and heat of the evening. He came slowly, she thought unsteadily, along the passages, and climbed the stairs towards his room with an effort. It seemed to her excited imagination almost a miracle when the door of his bedroom closed upon him, and the pale blueness of dawn stealing through the high staircase window proved to her that this night of watching was almost past. But what might the morning bring forth?

The morning brought nothing except the ordinary routine of household life at Bedloe. Mr. Chester got up at his usual hour, in his usual health. He sent for the doctor, however, in the course of the day, partly because he wanted him, partly to see how Winnie would behave.

"I have the stomach of an ostrich," he said, "but still that port was a little too much. To drink port with impunity, one should drink it every day."

"It is a great deal better never to drink it at all," said the doctor; but Mr. Chester patted him on the back, and assured him that good port was a very good thing, and much better worth drinking than thin claret.

"I believe it is that sour French stuff that takes all the spirit out of you young fellows," he said.

Winifred was compelled to be present during this interview. She heard her father give an account to Edward of the expected guests.

"You shall come up and dine one evening," he said. "You must make acquaintance with the Earl, who may be of use to you. I shouldn't wonder if we had him often about here."

To Winifred, looking on, saying nothing, but vividly alive to her father's offensive tone of patronage, and to the significance of this intimation, there was torture in every word. But Edward looked at her with an unclouded countenance, and laughingly assured her father that he had known the Earl all his life.

"He is a very good fellow; but he is not very bright," he said.

"He may not be very bright, but he is a peer of the realm, and that is the sort of society that is going to be cultivated at Bedloe. I have had enough of the little people," Mr. Chester replied.

Edward Langton laughed, with the slightest, but only the very slightest, tinge of colouring in his face. "The little people must take the hint, and disappear," he said.

"But, of course, present company is always excepted. That has nothing to do with

you. You're professional ; you're indispensable."

Young Langton gave Winifred a look. It was swift as lightning, but it told her more than a volume could have done. The indignation and forbearance and pity that were in it made a whole drama in themselves. "I hope I shall prove myself worthy of the exception in my favour," was all he said.

"I have no doubt you will ; you were always one that knew your own place," said Mr. Chester.

"Father !" cried Winnie, crimson with shame and indignation.

"Hold your tongue !" he cried. "The doctor knows what I mean, and I know what he means ; we want no interference from you."

It was the first trial of the new state of affairs. She had to shake hands with him in her father's presence, with nothing but a look to express all

the trouble in her mind. But Edward on his part was entirely calm, with a shade of additional colour, but no more. He played his part more thoroughly than she did,—upon which, with the usual self-torture of women, a cold thought arose in her that perhaps it was not entirely an assumed part. From every side she had much to bear.

CHAPTER X

MISS FARRELL did not add to her pupil's trouble. When she heard the state of affairs, she gave up with noble magnanimity her intention of going away. "You must not ask me to meet any one—till the visitors come," she said. "I shall remain to give you what help I can; but you know my rule. When I am treated with rudeness, I make no complaint, I take no offence, but I go away."

"You would not have the heart to desert me," Winifred said.

"No, that is just how it is—I have not the heart; but I will take my meals in my room,

my dear. Your dear father"—habit was too strong in Miss Farrell's mind even for resentment—"no doubt his meaning was quite innocent; but we can't meet again—at all events for the present," she added, with much dignity.

"So long as you do not forsake me," cried Winnie, and Miss Farrell, touched, declared "I will never forsake you!" with fervour.

This added an element which was tragi-comic to Winifred's distress. With all the grave and terrible things that surrounded her, the misery of her new position, the sense of falsehood in her tacit acceptance of all her father was doing, her fears for him, the chill of alarm of another kind with which Edward's composure filled her—there was something ludicrous in having to provide for Miss Farrell's retirement into her own rooms, and the two different spheres thus

established in the house. Perhaps it gave her a little relief in the more serious miseries that were always so near. It threw a slight aspect of the fictitious into the sombre air of the house, which seemed charged with trouble.

But in the meantime the preparations went on for the expected guests. Mr. Chester meant that they should be received magnificently. Some of the rooms were entirely refurnished with a luxury and wealth of upholstering enough to fill even a millionaire with envy. Nothing so fine existed in the county as the two rooms which were being ornamented for the use of the very active-minded and energetic woman who was the young Earl's mother. To describe the sensation with which Winifred saw all this is well-nigh impossible. She had been made to consent in consequence of the arguments used by the very man whose interests

were assailed. But for Edward she would have refused to be any party to the proposed arrangement—and now she asked herself how far it was to go? Was she to be forced to consent if a further proposal were made to her? Was she to be driven to the very church door, in order to avert an evil which began, to her, every day to appear more visionary? Could it be that Edward—Edward himself, who had always been the soul of honour in her eyes—had lent himself to the conspiracy against her? Her heart cried out so against the coil of falsehood in which her feet seemed to be caught that life truly became a misery to her—false to her brothers, false to her father, false to herself. She could not say false to Edward, since it was Edward himself who exacted this extraordinary proof of devotion. Every principle in her being rose up against it as it went on from day to day. She asked herself whether it was doing

a less wrong to her father thus to deceive him by pretended submission than to tell him the truth even at the risk of an illness. And he had not to her the least air of being ill. He was a strong man, stronger than almost any other man of his age, more ruddy, more active. Her head swam with the multitude of her thoughts. Winifred's mind was too simple and straightforward to accept that idea of faith unfaithful. It became like a yoke of iron upon her shoulders. Mr. Chester grew stronger and more active, and louder and gayer every day ; while she faded and shrank visibly, unable to make any head against that sea of troubles that carried her soul away.

The eve of the appointed visit had arrived, and all the preparations were complete. Mr. Chester insisted that his daughter should go with him over all the redecorated rooms to see the effect. "You think perhaps that this

is all for my lady's gratification," he said; "that's a mistake. It's for the gratification of Winifred, the new Countess, when she comes home."

"If you mean me, papa"—

"Oh no, of course not! how could I mean you?" cried her father, rubbing his hands. "I mean Miss Chester, who is going to marry the Earl. Perhaps you don't know that young lady? She will bring her husband a pretty estate and a pretty bit of money in her apron, and please her father down to the ground."

"But, papa— Oh, I cannot, I cannot deceive you! It is deceiving you even to seem to—even to pretend to"—

"You had better hold your tongue, Winnie," he said sternly. "You had better not go any farther or you may be sorry for it. You should know very well by this time what I'm capable of when I'm crossed. But I don't mean to be

crossed this time, I can tell you. It would be hard if a man couldn't do what he likes with his own daughter. Go along with you, and don't speak back to me."

"But, papa"—

"Go, I tell you, before you put me in a passion," her father cried. And Winifred was terrified by the glare in his eyes, and the quick recurring fear that she might harm him took all power from her. She hurried away, leaving him to admire his upholstery by himself. And that afternoon and evening her distress reached its climax. She would not consult Miss Farrell. She would not see Edward. Things had gone too far indeed to be talked of, or submitted to any other decision than that of her own heart. Once or twice, nay a hundred times, the desire of the coward, to run away, occurred to her. But how could she, to think of nothing more, leave her father in

the lurch, and expose him to all the comments of the recent unfriendly acquaintances whom he thought friends? Winifred was one of those to whom the abandonment of a post was impossible; but such was the confusion of her misery, that flight, now or at another moment,—flight alone, hopeless, without leaving any trace behind her,—seemed to be the only way of escape. At dinner her father seemed to have forgotten her attempt at rebellion. He talked incessantly of the guests, rolling their titles with an enjoyment which was half ludicrous, half pitiful. “You must try and persuade old Farrell to show,” he said. “She’s very well thought of by all these grandees, and she can talk to them of people they know—besides, there’s her music, Winnie, that’s first rate. I’ll come and apologise if she pleases, but we must take care my lady’s not dull of an evening, and she must show.” He was in

such good spirits that after dinner, with much clearing of his throat, and something like a blush, he made her sit down to the piano and accompany him in one of the old songs for which he had been famous before he began to fear the memory of the singing man at Chester Cathedral. He had the remains of a beautiful voice, and still sang well in the old-fashioned style which he had learned when a boy. To hear him carolling forth a love-song of that period when Moore was monarch, was to Winnie a wonder and portent which took away her very breath. She trembled so in her part of the performance that the piano became inaudible in competition with the fine roll of Mr. Chester's grace-notes. "Why, I thought you could play at least," he said roughly. "I'll have old Farrell—she knows what she's about—to-morrow night."

"Well, my dear," Miss Farrell said, when this

conversation was reported to her, "you know what my feelings are ; but I am not dull to the credit of the family. It being fully understood what my motive is, I shall certainly appear to-morrow evening, and do my very best to make things go off well. I will play your dear father's accompaniment with the greatest pleasure. He has the remains of a very fine voice, and he has science, too, though it is old-fashioned. So has your brother George a beautiful voice ; I always wished him to cultivate it. We must do everything, Winnie, both you and I, to make things go off well. You are not in good spirits, it is true,—neither am I,—but we must forget all that for the credit of the house. And how do you think he is himself?" she added after a pause.

"He looks very well," said Winnie. "I see no signs of illness. Edward"—she paused a

little with a faint smile,—“I think I should say Dr. Langton, for I never see him”—

“Oh, my dear, don’t judge him unjustly!—he thinks that is necessary.”

“You all think it is necessary,” cried Winnie, with a little outburst of feeling, “to make me as unhappy as possible. I mean to say that I think—I hope he is mistaken. Even doctors,” she said, with a smile, “have been mistaken before now.”

“That is very true,” said Miss Farrell gravely, and then she rose and kissed the pale face opposite to her. “Anyhow, my dear, you and I will do our best for him as long as there are strangers in the house.”

Winifred was worn out by the strain of these troubled days, and by the self-controversy that had been going on within her. She fell asleep early in profound exhaustion, the dead sleep of forces overstrained and heart stupefied with

trouble. She woke suddenly in the early dawn of the morning, while as yet everything was indistinct. What had woke her, or if it was any external incident at all that had done so, she could not tell at first ; there seemed a tingle and vibration in the pale air. Was it the early twittering which had begun faintly among the thick foliage outside ? She listened, rising up in her bed, with an intensity for which there seemed no reason, for no definite alarm occurred to her mind. Everything was still, not a sound audible but those first faint chirpings, interrogative, tentative, from the trees. She was about to compose herself to rest again, when suddenly there sounded tingling through the silence the sound of a bell, a little angry, impatient jingle repeated, tearing the stillness. Winifred was too much startled and confused to realise what it was, but she got up hastily, and, throwing her dressing-gown round her, opened her door to

hear better. The thought that came first to her mind was, that the summons was at the door, and that it meant one of the boys coming home. Her heart leaped to her throat with excitement. The boys had come home at all sorts of hours in the time which was past, but now, what could this summons be? It came again while she stood trembling, wondering; and then, with a cry, Winifred flew along the corridor. Mr. Chester's room was in the wing, at some distance from the other sleeping-rooms of the house. Everything was silent, an atmosphere of profound sleep, calm tranquillity in the dim air, through which the night-lamp in the hall below burned with a weird glimmer. The blueness of the dawn in its faint pervasion seemed more ghostly than the night.

As Winifred hurried along, another door opened with a hasty sound, and old Hop-

kins stumbled forth. "What is it, Miss Winifred?"

She had no breath to reply. She put him before her, trembling as they reached Mr. Chester's door. She was terrified by the thoughts of what she might see. But there was nothing that was terrible to see. A voice came out of the curtains, querulous, with an outburst of abuse at old Hopkins, who never could be made to hear.

"Send for Langton," Mr. Chester said.

"It's the middle of the night, please sir," old Hopkins replied.

"Send for Langton," repeated the voice. It had a curious stammer in it; a sibilant sound. "S—s—send for Langton," with another torrent of exclamations.

The old butler hurried out of the room, muttering to himself, "It will be half an hour before I can wake one of those grooms, and

he'll take the skin off me before that. Miss Winifred, oh, it's only the doctor he wants; it's nothing out of the common!"

"I will go," she said.

"You? But it's the middle of the night, and not a soul awake."

"Is he very ill? Tell me the truth. I will go quicker than any one else."

"Miss Winifred, you've no call to be frightened. He's been the same fifty times. He don't want the doctor no more than I do. Oh, goodness, there he is at it again!"

Then the bell sent a wild, irritated peal into the air, which evidently ended abruptly in the breaking of the bell-rope.

"I will go!" Winifred said, and the old man, relieved, hurried back to his master. She put on quickly a long ulster, which covered her from head to foot, and hurried out into the strange coolness and freshness of the unawakened

world. There was no need, she said to herself, but it was a relief and almost pleasure to do something. The great stillness, the feeling of the dawn, the faint blue-tinted atmosphere, a something which came before the light, all breathed peace about her. It was like a disembodied world, another state of existence in which nothing real or tangible was. She flew along, the only creature moving save those too early, questioning birds, and felt in herself a curious elevation above mortal boundaries, as if she too was disembodied and could move like a spirit. The strange abstractedness of the atmosphere, the keen yet soft coolness, the unimaginable solitude possessed her like a vision. She felt no sensation of anxiety or fear, but seemed carried along upon her errand like a creature of the air, unfamiliar with the emotions of the world. As it happened, Langton's groom was already preparing his master's

horse for some early visit. He stared at Winifred as if she had dropped from the skies, but made no remark, except that his master would be ready instantly; and she turned back through the sleeping village, still wrapped in the same abstraction, walking along as in a dream. One labourer, setting out to work at distant fields, passed, and stared dumb and awe-stricken at her, as if she had been a ghost. His was the only figure save her own that was visible. When she was half-way home, Edward galloped past, waving his hand to her as he hastened on. For her part, Winifred felt that there was no longer any need to hurry. She wandered on under the trees, where now all the birds were awake, chatting to each other—forming their little plans for the endless August day, the age of sunshine and sweet air before them, now that night once more was over—before they began to sing. She was unspeak-

ably eased, consoled, rested by that universal tranquillity. The dew fell upon her very heart. She lingered to look at a hundred things which she had seen every day all her life, which she had never noticed before. It was not sunrise as yet; the world was still a land of dreams, waiting the revelation of the reality to come. Thus it was some time before she reached the house, and yet she was surprised when she reached it, having got so far away from that centre of human life with all its throbbings, into the great quiet of the morning world.

Something, an indefinable disturbance, a change of a kind which made itself felt, was in the place. The door stood wide open, a scared groom was walking Langton's horse up and down, the windows were still closed, except one, at which two or three indistinct figures seemed looking out. There arose a flutter, she could not tell why, in Winifred's

breast. She almost smiled at herself for the involuntary sensation which marked her return from a world of visions to that of real life. Then Edward Langton appeared coming out, as if to meet her in the open door.





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